

67 GAMES INSIDE!
THE BIGGEST TITLES – NEWS, PREVIEWS, REVIEWS, AND MORE
PLUS!
HEADSET SPECIAL OFFER INSIDE!
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THE FIRST 100% REVIEW!
After 25 years, we hand out our first ever perfect score
25TH
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A truly epic crime saga



Issue 327 / March 2018

"Our tribute to gaming over the last quarter-century"

What an honour it is to stand at the helm of this fine publication as it celebrates 25 years of top-quality coverage, expert verdicts, and absolutely criminal puns. In this age of YouTube, blogs, and various other things we don't understand, it's a joy to still be able to bring you 100 pages of honest-to-goodness gaming magazine every month.

We couldn't just take this as an excuse to harp on about ourselves, though – head over to our massive cover feature, and you'll find not just egotistical self-congratulation, but also our tribute to gaming as a whole over the last quarter-century.

Our birthday isn't the only thing to make this a historic issue, either. After 327 issues, this month we're giving out our first-ever 100% score. Flick to the reviews section to find out which title earned this prestigious award.

All that, plus: Japanese gangsters, rampaging dinosaurs, ancient empires, cardboard constructions, videogame movies, treasure-hungry pirates, and much, much more.

Enjoy your GM!

Robin

Robin Valentine – Editor

GET MORE FROM YOUR GM!



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...or subscribe. See p92 for details.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

MY TOP PICKS THIS ISSUE







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25TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL

COVER STORY
Only the best games are featured on GM's cover!

Team GM

Meet The Magazine's Makers!



THE MOST DEDICATED TEAM IN THE BUSINESS

The 2018 GamesMaster crew, standing by to make another 25 years of the best gaming magazine around. By then we'll probably be cyborgs in flying cars, so that's something to look forward to.



Robin Valentine
Our editor's been lost in the archives for half of this issue, digging up lost nuggets of GM history. In the process he's also turned up a Nokia N-Gage, a John Woo-branded Xbox, and a couple of old staff members we'd forgotten about...

Favourite gaming moment of the last 25 years:
That twist in Bioshock



Sam Greer
In just her second issue, our plucky staff writer's managed to argue her way to giving out GM's first 100% score – and not just because we're all scared of her battering us at Gang Beasts again. Which game received this great honour? Read on to find out...

Favourite gaming moment of the last 25 years:
Meeting the first Colossus in SOTC



Ben Tyrer
This is, sadly, Mr T's last issue. He's stepping down as our RetroMaster, but at least he's going out with a bang – literally, with a rundown of one of his all-time favourites, Burnout 3. Keep your gags about his run doing the feature being a car crash to yourself.

Favourite gaming moment of the last 25 years:
Making people ragequit in Rocket League



Louise Blain
There must be something in the water, because Louise is also leaving us, stepping away from the IndieMaster and CultureMaster regulars she's written since time immemorial. Keep an eye out for her, though – we're told she'll be popping up on YouTube soon...

Favourite gaming moment of the last 25 years:
Ezio finding Altair's body in AC: Revelations

Issue 327/March 2018



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FANBASE

The best of your emails, tweets, and carrier pigeon death threats

Find out more about Nintendo's latest brilliantly weird invention, Labo, in our news story on p10.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Nintendo's changing the game, says Clint

I'm a father of two, and have been gaming for 30+ years. When I first saw the Switch, I thought, "Meh, it's for Nintendo fan-boys" and dismissed it. However, my nine-year-old autistic son wanted one, and I said he could have it for Christmas. I was still not won over, but my son repeatedly asked me to play, so when we go out, we play Mario Kart. His friends at school play Minecraft with him, and at New Year, during a family get-together, we had a huge 1-2 Switch quick draw competition which was an absolute riot.

When the kids went to bed, I played through Zelda and Mario Odyssey and had a blast. My son downloaded Sonic Mania, and we relived my gaming youth together. And while at first I thought the controllers were a bit daft, they're actually surprisingly comfortable and intuitive.

My son and I watched the Nintendo Labo announcement in absolute wonder, amazed at the innovation Nintendo keep surprising us with, and my lad is beside himself with excitement. For a long time now, I have stared at a screen, shooting Nazis/aliens/gangsters (delete as applicable) and I now look around, and see Nintendo redefining my beloved hobby, and giving my socially dysfunctional son a medium to play, create, learn, and laugh with his peers in unimaginably amazing new ways... Well done Nintendo, you've converted an old sceptic like me.

Clint Gardner, email

We love that Nintendo is always experimenting and trying new things – and changing the way we game in the process. Glad you've been convinced too, Clint! ■



1-2 Switch includes a series of party games played using Switch's motion control, vibration, and sensor features.

WIN!

Got an opinion? Have even the barest grasp of words and how to put them together? The best letter bags a free mystery prize!*

*Don't forget to include your postal address and chosen gaming format!



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Making history

What's been your favourite gaming moment of the last 25 years?

That first time a zombie turned its head around and came after me in Resident Evil... legged it! True fear!

Ciarán Coughlan, Facebook

Seeing Mario leap out of that pipe in full 3D in Super Mario 64, thus beginning my love affair with Nintendo!

Eoin O' Callaghan, Facebook

Playing through Journey for the first time blew me away. I had never really thought of videogames as an artform until then, and it completely changed my perspective on games. The ending gives me goosebumps every time!

Rory, @Schnurrburt_

I'd have to say borrowing my brother's original PlayStation and playing Final Fantasy VII for the first time. And consequently lying to him by saying I didn't cry when Aerith died, because I didn't want to sound like a wuss!

Shade the Raven, @RavenWitchShade

Our favourite gaming moment of the last 25 years? Getting to write for this ace magazine!

Switching up

GamesMaster wassup!!!

What do you think is coming next from Nintendo? They must be working on VR, surely they will be integrating this into the Switch 2 somehow...

With the huge success of the Switch I can't see them switching (excuse the pun) to a whole new console innovation – can you? They will surely capitalise on the success and build upon it.

I think the Wii U would have been far more successful if they had just marketed it as the Wii 2. I swear parents were confused by it and just thought it was a pad add-on to the current Wii.

Anyway I'm up for a Mini 64, then a Switch 2 with VR as soon as possible.

Love the mag, keep working hard!

Sam Hamilton, email

Wassup Sam!!!

Woah, slow down! Remember, Switch hasn't been out that long yet – let's give Nintendo some time to build on its success. We're actually hoping it doesn't go down the 3DS road of rapid iterations – e.g. a Switch 2 – as it's just going to be



READER REVIEW

Redz Redz writes in with their verdict on **Pokémon Ultra Sun and Moon**

If anyone remembers, I did a reader review of the original Moon, I found it to be a little disappointing, but overall an okay game

So what's changed? To be honest, not much. I get the feeling that this game was what Game Freak wanted the original game to be, as it only has a few new additions.

Most noticeable is the story. It features bosses from previous regions (yay) and a new trial. Only downside is It takes *forever*, to get anything done! I personally like a story in a game, but this is basically a repeat of the original game with a few additions.

Other features? Well you can ride Mantine, and there's a gimmicky photo club. Apart from that... Not much.

And if, like me, you own an old 2DS, then you are going to lag, really bad. In battle, the time from selecting a move to it actually registering is a lifetime.

It's a shame, because it *is* good game, just not a classic. Thanks for reading!

75%



"SURELY NINTENDO WILL BE INTEGRATING VR INTO THE SWITCH 2"

too expensive for fans to keep up. For now, all we want from Switch is more great games, with some fun side-projects such as Labo along the way. (Read more about that on p10.)

We'd be very curious to see a Nintendo-brand VR headset, but despite the company's history with the tech, we'd say that's probably a way off still – we'd bet Ninty will wait for virtual reality to get cheaper, more accessible, and more polished before getting involved.

But, to be honest, with Nintendo, the one thing you can always count on is you'll never be able to predict what it does next, so who knows!

Mag-nificent

What's been your most memorable GamesMaster magazine moment of the last 25 years?

The GMpals section of the magazine, in which I made contact with the woman who is now my wife of ten years and mother to my two daughters. We still have that issue with the advert she placed for a pen pal.

John, @jclarkesemmens

Many memories over the years but all have been happy ones. Just feeling like you value your readers and allowing us a voice in your mag. Many entries in your mag and highlighting mental health within the gaming community shows you are willing to cover many aspects. Thank you.

Ryan Booth, @The_Geektrovert

Can't remember what issue it was, but reading my first ever copy of GamesMaster when I was eight or nine and realising people could write about games for a living inspired me to become a games journalist. So thanks, y'all!

Astrid Johnson, @jaffameister

Bad moment in my GM history, got a brand new mag that I hadn't read yet, got food poisoning and spewed all over its beautiful front cover. Well...

RL&H Studios, @RedZRedZ99

My first time I emailed you and it was in the mag. Was chuffed as hell and you sent me a box of stuff too!

James Champion, Facebook

We've been so touched by the outpouring of love and support from you guys this month! GamesMaster wouldn't be anything without our readers, so big thanks to every single last one of you. We hope you're here for the next 25 years too. ■

OFF THE CHART!

The hot topics you've been gabbing about

- **30%** Real jobs that would make cool games
- **23%** Classic GM features that should come back
- **22%** Metal Gear without Kojima
- **15%** Educational games
- **10%** Your GamesMaster magazine collections

YOUR TOP 5 MOST WANTED

The most exciting upcoming games, as voted for by you on our Facebook and Twitter pages



1 RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2

Format PS4, XO **ETA** 26 October

Another delay? To late October?! At this point, we're wondering if Rockstar is just seeing how long it can keep a game at the top of our Most Wanted list...



2 SPIDER-MAN

Format PS4 **ETA** Summer

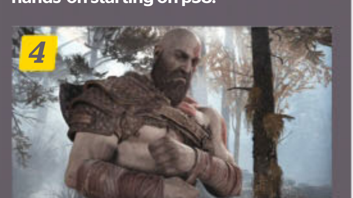
Every month you vote this into the top five is a month we sit here for an hour trying to think of new spider puns. This game really has legs. Eh? Eh?!



3 YAKUZA 6: THE SONG OF LIFE

Format PS4 **ETA** 20 March

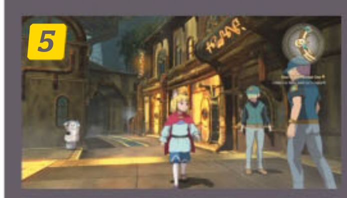
Not to be confused with 'J'Accuse Ya', an upcoming French courtroom drama game that doesn't exist. Read our huge hands-on starting on p38.



4 GOD OF WAR

Format PS4 **ETA** 20 April

Gaming's most furious Greek returns to our screens on the most chilled-out day of the year. We're expecting high scores. If you catch our drift.



5 NI NO KUNI II: REVENANT KINGDOM

Format PS4, PC **ETA** 23 March

Expect our review next issue – though it may just be 1,000 words of cooing over how cute Higgledies are.

YOU LOVE GAMES

Cool stuff and videogame culture

Eric Matos dares to ask the question "what if Mario and Luigi were in Fallout?" So awesome.

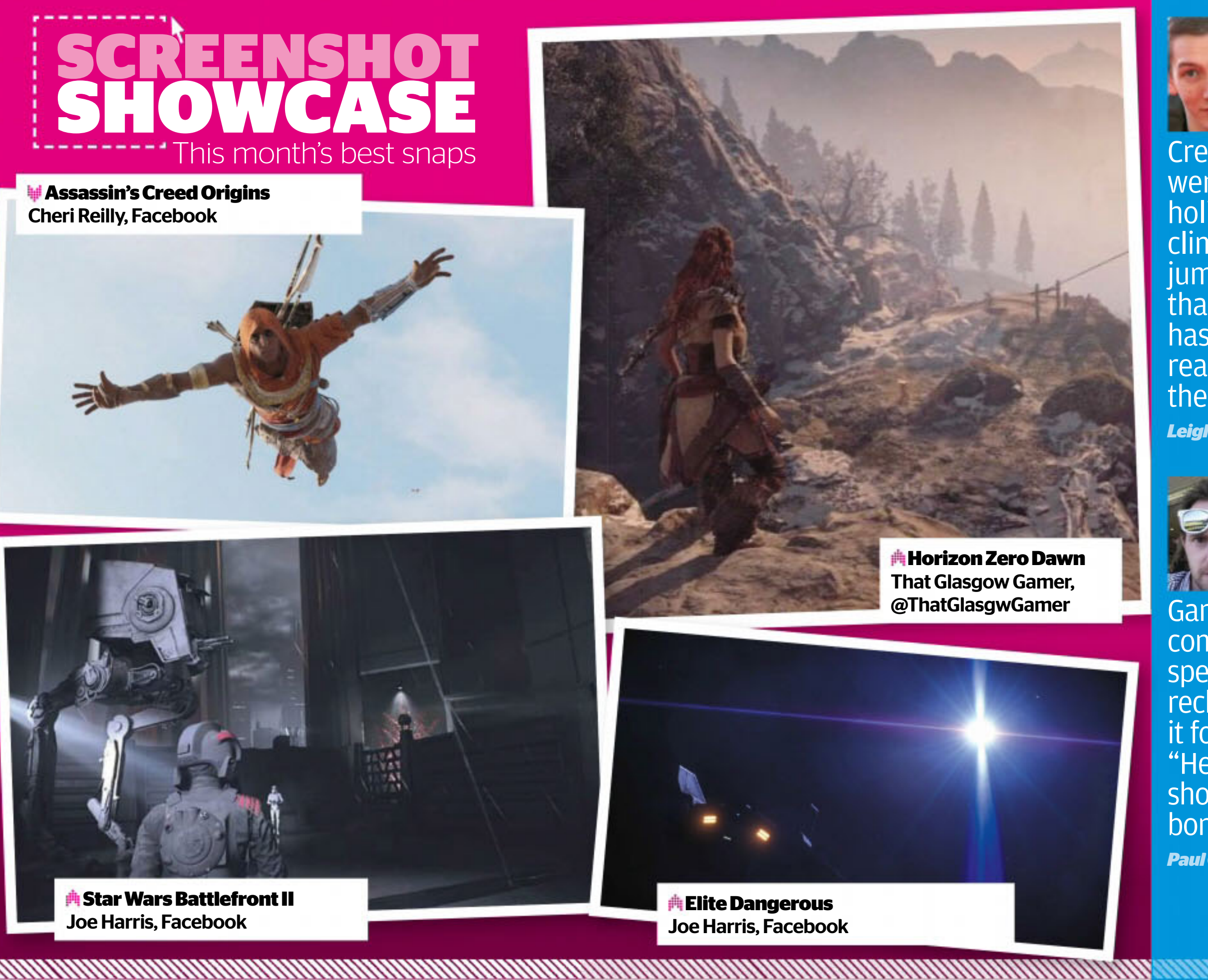
We're loving the sly expression on this clay Jazz Jackrabbit figure, made by Melissa Nicole Turchinetz!

Check out this awesome drawing of Mega Man by Christopher Green.

Gaz Backhouse's Donkey Kong and Sonic sketches are spot on!

SCREENSHOT SHOWCASE

This month's best snaps



Assassin's Creed Origins
Cheri Reilly, Facebook

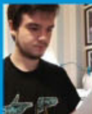
Horizon Zero Dawn
That Glasgow Gamer, @ThatGlasgwGamer

Star Wars Battlefront II
Joe Harris, Facebook

Elite Dangerous
Joe Harris, Facebook

SOCIAL GROUSING

Wisdom and weirdness from our bustling social media channels



They should make a game about being a political spin doctor. Unruly MPs are the boss battles.

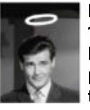
Thomas Broome-Jones, @TBroomey



What would it be like to have a farming sim during Medieval English feudalism? Surviving Roman control during the lifetime of Jesus Christ? I don't know why I've never thought about this.

Will Templeton, @Willeth

MANIAC OF THE MONTH!



I want a game set in 1558-1662 on the island of Mauritius as you try and prevent the extinction of the dodo.

Stuart Neill, @SaintlyStuart



I was amazed by how educational Assassin's Creed II was. When I went around Italy on holiday I was like "Yep, climbed that, hid there, jumped from the top of that." But the details it has on the landmarks, it really felt like I'd been there before.

Leigh Way, @LA_Way



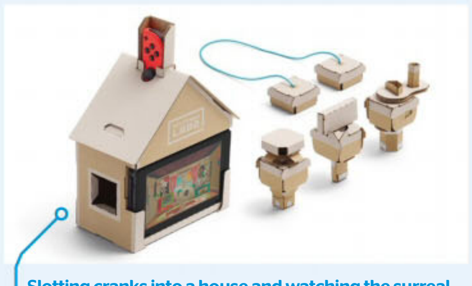
I still play videogames imagining old school GamesMaster TV show commentary... "His special ability meter is recharged but he's saving it for the final boss!" or "He's found the secret shortcut to pick up some bonus coins!"

Paul Carter, @PauloRelli

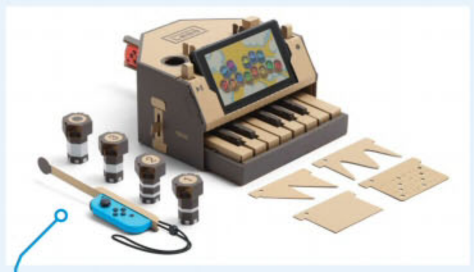
Contrary to early suggestions, Nintendo won't offer free replacements for Labo creations crushed by clumsy hands and feet, but unofficial workarounds are surely possible.

LABO MARVELS

Three of the best features of Nintendo's cardboard creation



Slotting cranks into a house and watching the surreal results suggests a Labo WarioWare could be wonderful.



Knobs tweak the piano's pitch and tone, while a record button suggests you'll be able to save your best tunes.



This RC bug might look a little plain, but the beauty of cardboard is that you can personalise your creations.

WELCOME TO THE FOLD





The future of games is… cardboard? Well, so Nintendo would have us believe. Its latest offbeat novelty, due out 27 April this year, brings the company's toymaker past into the present. Labo is a beguiling blend of construction and play: a set of thick cardboard templates you push out and build into large, tactile controllers. Each houses the Switch's tablet display, with the right Joy-Con's IR camera reading reflective strips on the various moveable parts, allowing you to play a range of bite-sized games without touching a digital button.

It's typically Nintendo, really: while its competitors focus on 4K and VR, here's something decidedly lo-fi, the kind of homebrew tech that wouldn't look out of place in a Michel Gondry film. But it's also thrillingly different and quietly dazzling in its way. Bashing out a tune on a dinky Labo piano is strangely magical, as is winding a reel on a hand-made fishing rod to catch a whopper wriggling around inside the screen.

There's also a radio-controlled vehicle, which uses the rumble from two Joy-Con to scud along; a small house into which you can slot widgets to produce surprising effects; and a motorbike's handlebars, the tablet displaying the road ahead as you physically turn to negotiate corners. Finally, a separate set revives Miyamoto's forgotten Wii U sideline Project Giant Robot. This asks you to assemble a slightly preposterous-looking backpack and headset, with strings attached to your arms and legs so you can stomp and punch buildings as, well, a giant robot.

As Nintendo's gentle pre-announcement warning made clear, Labo is designed primarily for the young and young-at-heart, and parents especially will have spotted the educational potential. Step-by-step on-screen guides don't merely talk builders through the construction process, but offer insight into exactly how these gadgets function – perfect for budding engineers. Still, any learning benefits are likely to be a happy side-effect rather than the primary aim for a company that's always been laser-focused on the joy of play.

These cardboard contraptions are an unfortunate reminder of the wave of plastic peripherals that cluttered homes during the Wii era, though they're more eco-friendly, customisable, and properly functional. As with Wii Sports and Play, the first two Labo packs seem to have been designed with a view to inspiring other developers, too. They may be unlikely to meet Nintendo's reputation for durable hardware (though these are the rare gadgets a blob of glue or piece of tape should be enough to fix) but only those lacking in imagination could fail to see exciting potential of Labo beyond the bundled minigames.

The other models we've seen are cases in point. A steering wheel and accelerator pedal seem ideal for Mario Kart; a camera gives us hope that Pokémon Snap 2 might one day be a reality; a pump-action gun would suit any number of shooters. And that's before crafty indies get their hands on it. The future's cardboard? Nintendo might just convince us.

"THE KIND OF HOMEBREW TECH THAT WOULDN'T LOOK OUT OF PLACE IN A MICHEL GONDRY FILM"



LIGHTS, LARA, ACTION

Unearthing the secrets of the upcoming **Tomb Raider** movie

For true authenticity to the games, the film will include a scene in which Lara crafts an entire assault rifle out of deer bones.



EARLY DAYS

The gaming landscape changed immeasurably when Tomb Raider launched in the mid-'90s. The original offered one of the first true 3D adventures, with unprecedented technical prowess powering an experience filled with tricky traversal, intricate puzzles, and explosive action. Another revolution was its fiery heroine. At a time where female roles rarely extended beyond that of the damsel in distress, Lara Croft, with her dual pistols and graceful gymnastic abilities, became the darling of the 32-bit era. The presence of a strong female character was what initially drew a young Vikander to the series.

It's been over two decades since the Tomb Raider series stormed onto the gaming scene, featuring fierce puzzles and adrenaline-fuelled action in exotic locations from The Great Wall Of China to the lost city of Atlantis. The allure of the series has spanned far beyond the confines of the console. Its leading lady, Lara Croft, evolved into a cultural icon, recognisable even to those who have never touched a controller. She's graced the cover of British music, culture, and fashion magazine The Face, appeared in video clips on stage at U2's world tour, and became the poster girl for energy drink Lucozade, which was charmingly renamed 'Larazade' for the summer of 2001.

It was a promotional play for the first Tomb Raider movie that not only increased Lara's popularity but propelled actress Angelina Jolie to Hollywood superstardom. A lot has changed since the last time we saw Lara on the big screen in the 2003 sequel Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle Of Life, including a change in the game's developer and several revamps of Lara's likeness under Crystal Dynamics.

The new movie takes much inspiration from the studio's rebooted series, in particular, the 2013 instalment, Tomb Raider. Like that game, this is also an origin story that deals with a shipwrecked Lara surviving on a remote and hostile island, finding her feet as an adventurer through being pushed to the edge of her physical and mental endurance. However, while the basic premise is the same, this won't be a carbon copy of Lara's virtual exploits. Director Roar Uthaug explains: "With this movie, we are creating a whole new origin story for Lara Croft for the big screen. We are telling a whole new story of a whole new Lara Croft." Notable differences so far include Lara's abode in East London, where she works as a bicycle courier and frequents an MMA gym, and her motivation for adventure. Here, she is searching for a mythical island off the coast of Japan, the last known location of her father before his mysterious death.

From her appearance and demeanour, Lara appears to be very much the same relatable and realistic character we've seen in the recent games. Stepping into the iconic explorer's sturdy hiking boots is Swedish actress Alicia Vikander, whose relationship with the Tomb Raider series started long before the movie's casting call. Recalling her early experiences with the series at the age of 11, Vikander says: "I was so scared, so I mostly did the preparation in the manor. I stayed there; there were no bears or anything coming out to freak me out!"

"THE NEW MOVIE TAKES MUCH INSPIRATION FROM CRYSTAL DYNAMICS' REBOOTED SERIES"

Action woman

Vikander made a name for herself in films such as The Danish Girl and independent science fiction thriller Ex Machina, and while she's been in films such as The Man from UNCLE and Jason Bourne, Tomb Raider marks her first role as a full-blown action movie lead. As you'd expect, she had to undergo gruelling physical training to gain Lara's athletic physique as well

The movie's described as being far from another superficial Hollywood action story; it's got heart, reality, and grit.



SILVER SCREEN

The first Tomb Raider movie made almost $275 million globally at the box office. The film presented a very different protagonist to the one in the upcoming release. Much like the cool and collected badass of the Core Design era, Lara, as played by Angelina Jolie, was a self-assured, 007 type of character. Its sequel, The Cradle Of Life, failed to replicate the same success as the first, with the studio citing the ill-fated sixth game, The Angel Of Darkness, as the reason for the movie's lacklustre performance.

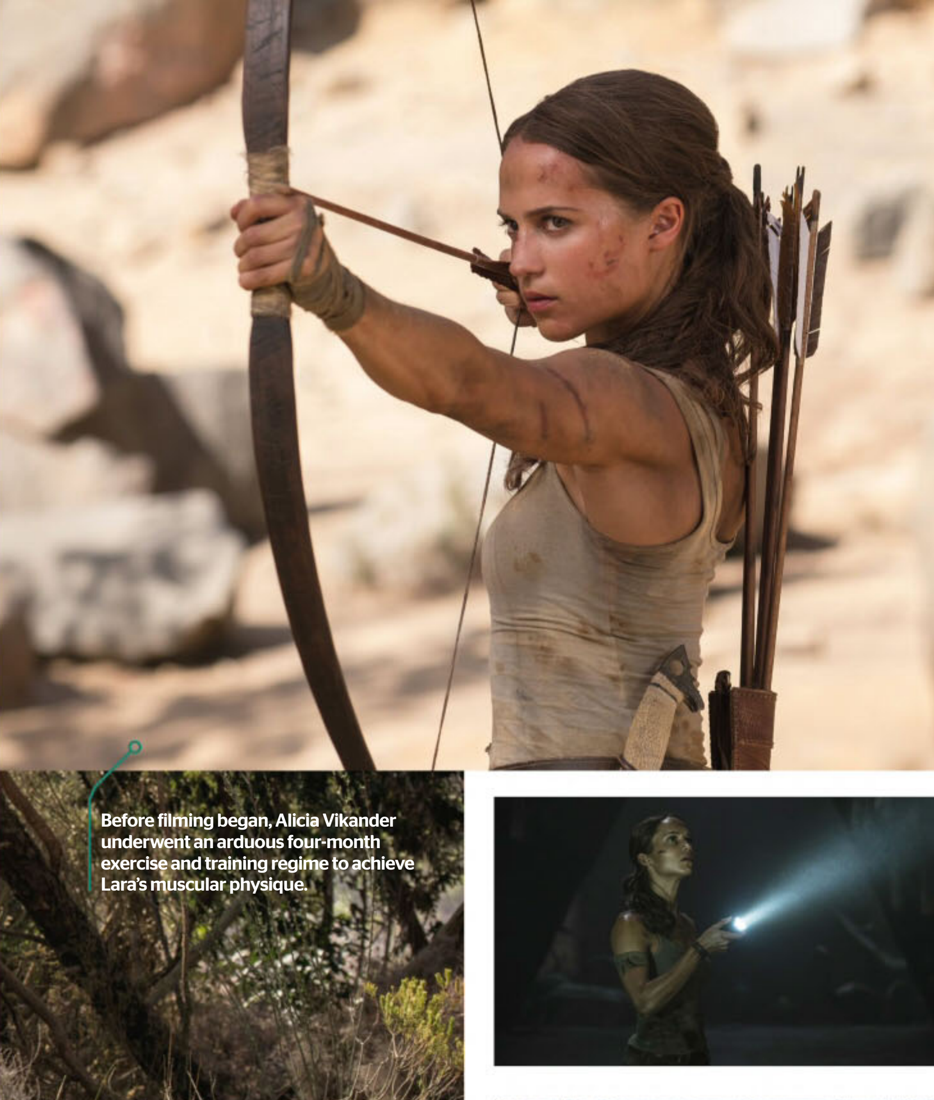
as endure some harsh situations while filming. Uthaug recalls the actress exhibiting a level of determination and resolve to equal Lara's: "We threw her around in cold water, we had a boat on a big gimbal where we had wind machines, and rain towers, and big water cannons throwing gallons of water at her, and she never complained. She had some really rough turns on this movie, physically, but she really stepped up to the plate and embraced it and never complained, and was just a real trooper, kind of like Lara Croft. She kept fighting through it."

For Vikander, however, the biggest challenge didn't come from the physical aspect, but rather the pressure that comes from portraying a character as iconic and loved as Lara Croft. As well as staying true to the character by embracing Lara's wit, intelligence, and ferocity, the team wanted to present a lead that's more in line with what modern audiences have come to value in their heroes. Vikander explains: "The greatest trait of our superheroes now is the fact that they are able to show that they are vulnerable. It feels much more 2018, to know about their superpowers, but with their flaws, we get to actually make them more human, and for us to be able to relate with them, so that's what we are trying to do with this film."

Lara love

Despite being very much a new Lara Croft for a new generation, perceptive fans will have picked up on a few throwbacks to the earlier iterations of the famous treasure hunter, including footage of her donning her classic braid and dual Heckler & Koch USP Match pistols – the very same model used in the previous movies.

"TOMB RAIDER IS CURRENTLY LOOKING EVERY BIT THE EPITOME OF A SILVER SCREEN ADAPTATION DONE RIGHT"



Before filming began, Alicia Vikander underwent an arduous four-month exercise and training regime to achieve Lara's muscular physique.



Director Roar Uthaug is no stranger to shooting water-heavy action sequences. His previous movie, The Wave, focuses on an 80-metre tall tsunami.

A long-time fan of the games, Uthaug admits that although his focus was primarily on making the best possible Tomb Raider movie for the big screen, he did want to cater to all fans of the series in some small way, saying: "Myself being a film nerd and a game nerd, I wanted to give some stuff back to the fans as well, so there are easter eggs. We tried to give all the fans a little bit."

Although there's always a certain level of trepidation to be met with any live-action adaptation of a video game series – they don't exactly have a great track record, it has to be said – Tomb Raider is currently looking every bit the epitome of a silver screen adaptation done right. Roar Uthaug's experience with the series, and understanding of the brand and Lara as a character mean that this could be the strongest and most faithful videogame-to-film adaptation to date. Alicia Vikander's Academy Award bears testament to her acting prowess, while her commitment to, and passion for, the role shines through in the footage released thus far. From snappy one-liners to heart-pounding shootouts, she looks every bit the Tomb Raider; young, eager, and determined to propel the series and its much-loved heroine into the hearts and minds of eager cinema-goers once more. Tomb Raider arrives in cinemas in the UK on 16 March. ■



NEW BEGINNINGS

During the PS3/360 era audiences began to expect open environments and thrilling setpieces from their virtual adventures, and Lara's rather one-dimensional persona also began to feel outdated. By the time 2008's Tomb Raider: Underworld was released, it was abundantly clear to the team at Crystal Dynamics that the series and its leading lady would have to adapt in order to survive. Discussing the 2013 reboot, Vikander says: "This new game, I think, was created because society has changed a lot. What is considered to be a very attractive, sexy female character, the view of that has changed."



Manage to get a shot off from a glowing spot on the ground and you'll unleash a special hit.

GAME, SET, AND SWITCH

Mario goes Wimbledon, and a few old faces get a new lease of life

After an absolutely stunning 2017, Nintendo has unveiled some of its plans to take us into summer 2018. Fresh from once again saving Princess Peach from Bowser's clutches in the globe-trotting Super Mario Odyssey, our favourite Italian plumber is giving his new anthropomorphic hat-friend Cappy a break in favour of his racquet and tennis garb.

The last time Mario and co gave it a few sets was the disappointingly void-of-content Mario Tennis: Ultra Smash on Wii U. Promising beefier gameplay and the return of story mode, last seen in Mario Tennis: Power Tour from 2005, Mario Tennis Aces seems dead set on righting the wrongs of its predecessor.

Hit singles

In footage showcased by Nintendo, Mario, Luigi, Wario, and Waluigi are seen having a couple of back-and-forth singles games in a jammed stadium. The standard flow looks largely untouched, players having a selection of standard shots such as 'top-spin' and 'slice' (demarcated by different colour tails on the ball) to out-do their opponent. A meter can be charged up for special hits to give extra oomph when you're trying to capture that match-point, and there are 'chance shots', executed when standing on a special marker that lights up on the court, for when you're feeling particularly showy.

The single-player campaign, a feature finally carried over from the handheld iterations, is the most exciting part as Mario journeys through an expansive overworld taking on various challenges and bosses in racquet-sport. In one clip the red-capped hero bats fireballs back at a squad of wee piranha plants, while in another he's on a grassy forest-themed court facing down Petey Piranha. The former is an indicator of the kind of smaller stages we expect will make up the bulk of the main quest; the latter is likely how some of the new characters and stages are unlocked. There's no sign of who'll make up the rest of the roster yet, but Mario Tennis' original Waluigi is there, and that's enough for us.

Elsewhere, DLC for Mario + Rabbids has been announced in the form Donkey Kong. As well as including the ape himself as a playable addition to your team, it introduces a whole new world to play through with its own complete story – a jungle wilderness reminiscent of DK's homeland. He even sports a banana boomerang as a weapon – perfect for fooling dopey Rabbids.

A trio of ports has also been revealed for Switch, starting with hit DS JRPG The

> "MARIO TENNIS ACES SEEMS DEAD SET ON RIGHTING THE WRONGS OF ITS PREDECESSOR"

Mario Tennis Ace's story mode starts at the standard stadium before veering off into parts unknown.

World Ends With You. Co-developed and published by Square Enix, the game's anime aesthetic and blend of fantasy and reality through an inter-dimensional adventure made it a critical darling in 2012. This version, titled The World Ends With You: Final Remix, will include updated graphics, a new epilogue, and tweaks to the control scheme.

To us, from U

Making the jump too are Wii U side-scrolling platfomer Donkey Kong: Tropical Freeze and Zelda-themed Dynasty Warriors riff Hyrule Warriors. Like several games for that system, both were great releases undermined by a depleted player base. Tropical Freeze swings onto the Switch – newly playable Funky Kong in tow – on 4 May, and Hyrule Warriors: Definitive Edition, which merges the content from the Wii U and 3DS versions, is bashing its way to us in spring. Even if you've played some of these before, Nintendo is making it easy to justify giving them another shot. ■



What's your favourite Donkey Kong game ever?



Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze

It's refined into an inch of its life and looks breathtaking. It just has that 'magic'.
TheRetroGamingBlog, @RGB_RetroBlog



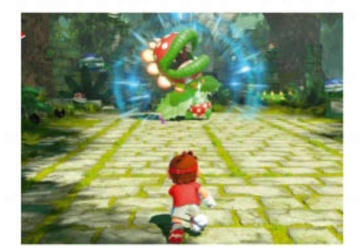
Donkey Kong Country

The music, sound, and graphics were superb at the time. Platforming was tight, challenging, and varied.
Friar The Tuk, @TukFriar

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Funky Kong makes a rare playable appearance in the Switch version of Donkey Kong: Tropical Freeze. He also runs the shop – an ape's gotta make a living.









Hyrule Warriors offers the novelty of playing as many different Legend Of Zelda characters (er, including Tingle) as you fight to save Hyrule.



Are those... ghosts? Looks like failing to save your patients will result in more than just a few seconds of guilt.



Who needs grass and trees? Stick in an overpriced visitors' car park and we'll soon be raking in the cash.



Look closely. Can you see a Sega arcade machine in the hospital? Then see a doctor, you're hallucinating!

WE'RE READY AND ILLIN'

Two Point Hospital injects silliness back into sims



Most games seem to be about putting people *in* hospital. This newly-announced comedy sim is all about making them better so that they can get *out*. If you and your patients are lucky, that is. A sequel to the legendary Theme Hospital in all but name, Two Point Studios' debut title is looking sick. 'Sick' in the way young people say it, of course.

In fact, the developer (just 16 people strong) is staffed by people who worked on Fable, Black And White, Theme Park... and, surprise surprise, Theme Hospital. When the people on your payroll can boast time working at the likes of Bullfrog, Lionhead, and Mucky Foot on their CVs, optimism about your first game is justified.

Insult to injury

The latest footage gives a good idea of what to expect. It concerns the case of Trevor, patient zero in an outbreak of "light-headedness". This literally-named condition sees people's heads transform into lightbulbs. Say *Watt*? Yes, it's true! Fortunately, Two Point Hospital is there to make the sufferers feel better. Er, probably. Others have turned into clowns (we reckon they feel funny), or are apparently made of boxes (your guess is as good as ours what's afflicting them. Perhaps a Labo test would tell us).

Joking aside, it'll be up to you to design the best hospital you can, to create – in the developer's own words – "the optimal place to definitely not die". If you're intrigued (and you definitely should be), then you can head on over to www.twopointhospital.com and sign up for the free 'Hospital Pass'. This will get you goodies such as a newsletter, a free – as yet unspecified – in-game item at launch, and early access to new trailers.

The game's been announced for PC. There are no sign of any console versions yet, but who knows? Maybe it'll make it to tablets. Tablets, get it? ■

> "DESIGN THE BEST HOSPITAL YOU CAN, CREATE 'THE OPTIMAL PLACE TO DEFINITELY NOT DIE'"



The Burning Question

Who's your favourite doctor or healer in videogames?



Nurse Joy
Show me another vet who will patch up a dragon for free.
Alex Eagles, @Cynibot



Doctor (Assassin's Creed II)
Ezio wouldn't have got very far without his healing potions!
Cheri Reilly, Facebook

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This is not, sadly, a shot from the movie. We're happy to claim a scoop if the scene happens, though.

WAHOO LET THE DOGS OUT

New Mario movie announced, Sleeping Dogs not allowed to lie

Our instinctive reaction to the announcement of a new videogame movie is, generally speaking, a deeply pained cry of "Why?!? When will you learn?" Or, sometimes, a guttural shriek from the depths of despair. These two movies, however, have the potential to be – dare we say it? – good.

A Mario movie has been announced! Or, more accurately, *another* Mario movie has been announced. The first was… well… it was live action, set in New York, Bob Hoskins played Mario, and Dennis Hopper was somehow convinced to star in it. We still wake up in a cold sweat in the night thinking about it sometimes.

The second attempt at a Mario film will be animated, and the project has been handed to Illumination Entertainment; best known for the excellent Despicable Me series. Shigeru Miyamoto is even involved behind the scenes on co-producer duties. A very promising set up, we reckon.

Yen we can!

Sleeping Dogs felt like a fun action movie at times, and last year it was revealed that an actual film based on the game was being made. Things have been quiet since, but at the beginning of February, Donnie Yen tweeted to say that it's still very much happening.

Yen, likely to take the main role, is an accomplished (deep breath) actor, director, fight choreographer, and *world champion martial artist*. With movies such as Ip Man and Rogue One to his name, Sleeping Dogs is likely to be worth watching for him alone.


We sincerely hope that it won't be a modern, 'hip' Mario into dank memes, pranks, and photos of his food.

"SHIGERU MIYAMOTO IS CO-PRODUCER ON THE NEW, ANIMATED MARIO FILM"

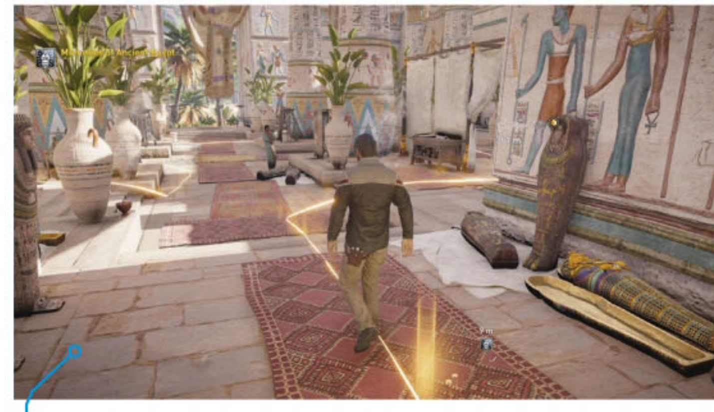
Extraction of the Brain
Mummies of Ancient Egypt
Station 4 of 18

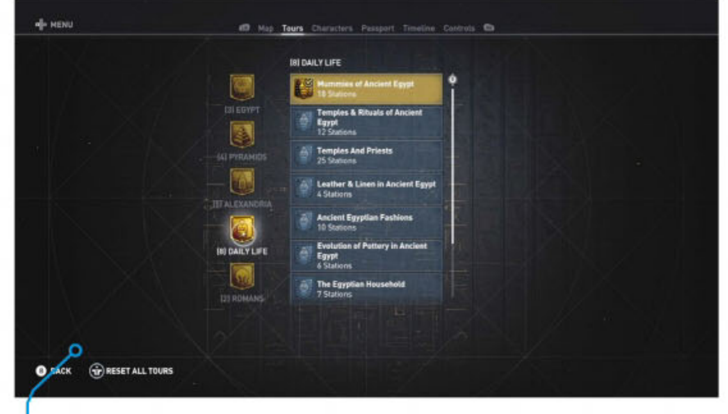
Bronze Hook and Evisceration tools

B CLOSE A MORE INFO



At stations on the tour the camera will pull out or zoom in on important buildings or activities.


The tours come with a nice little path to follow, but you can approach stations in whichever order you like. This isn't school, after all...



There are tours on everything from the mummification process (sure to please gruesome types) to the construction of the pyramids.

HORUS-TORY LESSON!

Assassin's Creed goes educational with Discovery Tour

You're still completely free to travel the map, and can even play as different avatars, including Cleopatra!



Educational games are something of a black sheep. How many standout examples are there? There certainly isn't one we would put on a list of the top 100 games, that's for sure. Discovery Tour might just change that.

This is Ubisoft's attempt to make the most of the detailed world of its most recent Assassin's Creed title. The series has always leaned strongly into its historical setting, utilising real locations and famous figures, but it's always been blended with the series' own conspiracy fiction. Discovery Tour takes out all the murder, story, and Templars. Ubisoft is pitching it as a true educational tool, something you could use in a classroom. A recreation of Ancient Egypt with a massive AAA budget? That's a tremendous proposition.

And it really works. Discovery Tour is free for owners of Origins now (and can be bought separately on PC), giving players the entire map, completely unlocked. There's no combat, but you can still climb, ride mounts, and use your eagle. NPCs and wildlife will still be doing their thing. You're free to travel the whole of Ancient Egypt without obstacle.

The focus of the Discovery Tour is, uh, tours. Dotted around the map are 'stations', highlighted waypoints that, when activated, will begin a tour with a guided path and various checkpoints, each one prompting a narration and drawing your attention to something in the world. These tours cover everything from mummification to the life of Cleopatra, and they're very well put together. Each one generally lasts about ten minutes but you can still walk around or control the camera while the narration plays. This is all real history you're learning, being taught to you via one of gaming's most lavishly crafted settings. Seeing the production values of Assassin's Creed being turned into a device for learning is initially jarring but ultimately, very compelling.

Top of the class

Ubisoft's aim is to get this into schools (removing combat helped drop the age rating to an appropriate 12), and the company's certainly capable of achieving that. Ubisoft's research has been incredible from the very first Assassin's Creed, and being able to share all that with the intention of teaching feels quite special. There's nothing in videogames like it at all, certainly nothing of this scale. Of course, Assassin's Creed Origins has taken some liberties with the period, due to holes on the historical records, or the needs of the game's design. To elaborate on this, as well as the historical tours there are also some behind-the-scenes stations that explain what went into the creation of the game and the thinking behind the decisions. Ubisoft is keen that people do not take its depiction of Ancient Egypt as gospel.

Even if you're not interested in being educated, there's something appealing about being able to explore Origins' world uninterrupted. You can go wildlife spotting, climb the pyramids, and blend in with the locals. You can also enjoy simply flying your eagle about, over all of Egypt, soaking up the sights. It's like a walking simulator with a massive budget, the perfect thing for when you're in the mood to chill out rather than cut throats.

The Discovery Tour transforms Assassin's Creed Origins into something else entirely. It won't be of interest to everyone but there's certainly a demand for the chance to explore that world and learn about it without violence. For us, it is a wonderful change from action-driven gaming, and we'll happily spend more time there. ■

"DISCOVERY TOUR TRANSFORMS ORIGINS INTO SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY: AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL"



The Burning Question

Which historical period would you love to see a videogame set in?

Victorian London

Rockstar to make another L.A Noire type game, but set in 1888 on the hunt for Jack the Ripper. Honestly how has this not been made?

Jack @NoGoodTilNoon

Feudal Japan

Would love to see an Assassin's Creed set during that time.

Tyler Meredith, Facebook

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PROTECT THE QUEEN!

It's a bug's life for Leon in Empires Of The Undergrowth



any years ago, while most GM readers were still grubs, there was a game called Sim Ant where you had to manage a colony of the insects. It was basically The Sims with more legs. People have wanted a followup for years but is Empires Of The Undergrowth a worthy successor? We sent Leon into the nest to find out.



0 MINUTES

My life as an ant colony begins as I always dreamed it would: killing woodworm and prising my jaws under the armoured shells of woodlice. What? I have very strange dreams. Things starts simply enough – just me, the queen, seven workers and a rotting log to call my own. It's all about the core ant beliefs to begin with: make more ants and kill anything that isn't you. It's the circle of life, only with six legs and twitchy antennae. My initial explorations, mastering insect nurseries, and food storage is made immeasurably more enjoyable thanks to a narrator going at it like West End Shakespeare and a soundtrack that thinks it's in Lord Of The Rings. "The workers have encountered the carnivorous larvae of ocypus olens... [twirls moustache] *the devil's coach horse*," the narrator tells me as the brass section goes *wild*.



20 MINUTES

The main thing I've learned so far is that being an ant is all about expansion. And lots and lots of ants. Seriously, think of as many ants as you can. You need more. They don't do small families (which is why ant Christmas is such a nightmare). I encounter some fully grown devil's coach horse beetles, which the narrator announces are "four times the size of an ant' while somehow making it sound like a missing line from Richard The Third. It's a massacre the first time because the tiny chitinous tanks plough through my ranks like a combine harvester through a field of puppies. Not only are they huge, and heavily armoured, with jaws like hydraulic presses, but they squirt a chemical that confuses the ants. The ones that aren't immediately eaten stagger around like they've just had a really good night out. Then they're eaten.



1 HOUR

The idea of safety in numbers is reinforced by the next level, where spiders eat my troops and a raiding party of rival ants steal my young (referred to as 'the slave makers' by the narrator with a villainous leer). There's no way of getting through this beyond careful expansion. Food is my main resource, both to make new ants and to replace the ones I've lost – blow all your supplies producing an army and you can't replace them when they die. And they will die. The spiders take ants away like scuttling kidnappers, as my troops throw themselves at them. I can kill them but it takes sacrifices to whittle away their health and finish them. I'm glad I decided to stop naming anyone. Partly because it's impractical to keep track of everyone but also because it's painful to lose your favourites. Except you Brian-237, I'll never forget you.



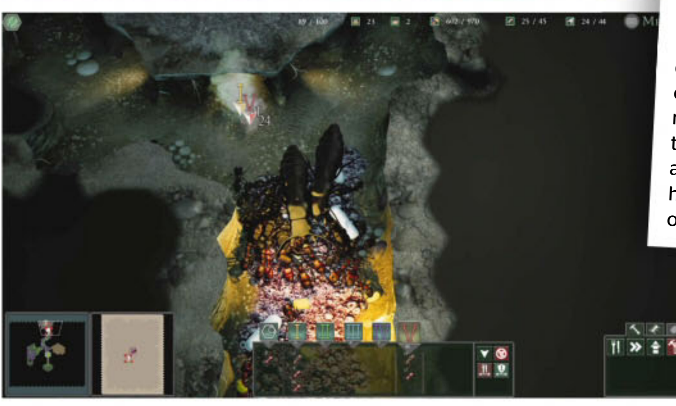
1 HOUR 15 MINUTES

One thing I love in Empires is the formicarium, basically a posh word for ant farm. In between missions this is like a permanent base to expand. It's mostly a free play area where you can use rewards from missions to expand your nest and unlock new types of ant. But it's set up like it's in a lab, with unseen scientists experimenting on the colony and commenting on the results. I've decided to call them Nice Lady and Bad Man, mainly because Nice Lady isn't trying to kill me, while Bad Man is almost certainly a psychopath. When he's left alone to perform a simple test – can my colony defeat 30 rival ants? – he goes mad and tries 30, 40, *60*, then giggles like a serial killer as he upends a beaker of devil's coach horses into the tank. It's a massacre.



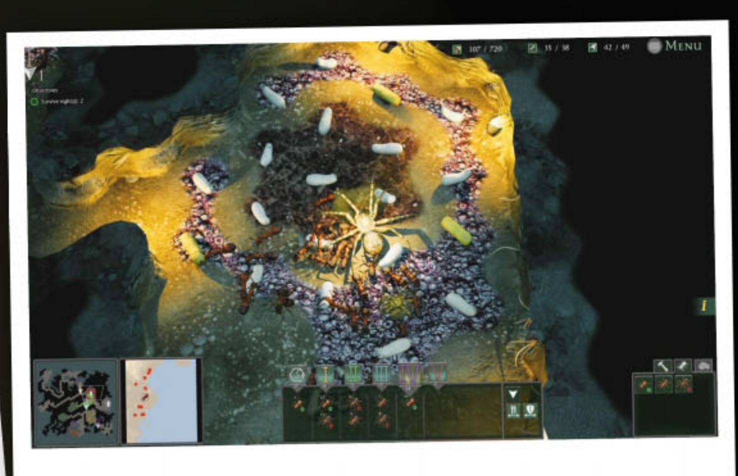
1 HOUR 30 MINUTES

My life as an ant now has a purpose: defeating Bad Man. His test is a kind of boss fight and I can't proceed until I beat him. That means dipping into previously completed missions and completing them to earn more food and upgrades. Along the way I meet a new enemy: mole crickets. They're like angry buildings in comparison to my ants but through careful upgrading of my food storage, and worker and soldier ants, the beasts go down one nipping bite at a time, drowning under the numbers rather than being outfought with any great tactics. The skill is not how you use your troops, it's just having enough that you become a tidal wave of pincers.



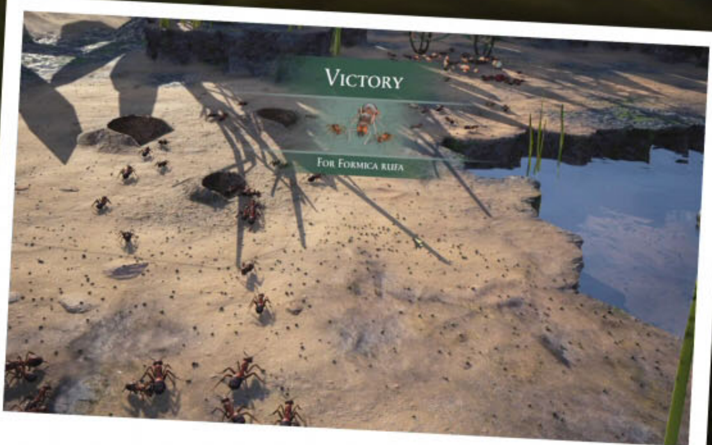
2 HOURS

I've earned enough to build my formicarium into a literal empire. I have so many ants it's easier to keep track of them by looking for which bits of ground aren't moving. I start the boss mission and it's like a war movie in miniature. As I hold back the attack on two fronts, the bodies pile up. The devil's coach horses can plough through my ranks like a train – last time they just walked up to my queen and killed her. This time I play my master stroke at the last minute: pulling everything back to the mouth of the nest to block it with my superior numbers. I've not only made a massive army, I've stockpiled enough food to replace it several times over. It's a bloodbath but I win.



2 HOURS 15 MINUTES

My prize is a trip to the beach: I've got a large nest and a sandy above-ground area to explore. I have to last three nights here, and something tells me it'll get harder each day. I start by strip-mining the underground area. Until I dig an entrance nothing can reach me, so I build my forces and supplies first. I've unlocked those acid-firing ants so I can fire gobs of nastiness from a distance as well as charge in and get all bitety. I'm going to need it, too, as once I *do* go topside there are tiger beetles, spiders, and hermit crabs. The first feel a bit like attacking a moving house, while the second are smaller but keep invading the nest. This is not going to be easy.



2 HOURS 30 MINUTES

The one benefit to living on the beach, apart from the weather and property prices, are the piles of dead sand flea bodies that litter the place after high tide. The tiger beetles are dangerous but it's worth the risk to harvest all that sweet, sweet... rotting dead crab. Look, ants aren't fussy, and with all the food I'm able to build a huge army of burn-spitting soldiers. Which is handy because the hermit crab attacks are relentless. And, as I suspected, it builds each night: first one, then two, and finally three attack at once. The real horror, though, is the fully grown wolf spider that appears right at the end. Fortunately, by that time I'm so well prepared that it barely has a chance to scare anyone before it almost instantly disappears under a tsunami of angry little jaws. This beach is *mine*.

ENJOYABLE *ANT*-TICS

This is one of the best Early Access games we've featured for a while. There may only be four main missions currently, but the challenge variations and a (literal) sandbox to develop make it satisfying to play. Plus it's easily accessible thanks to clear mechanics and a focus on practical feedback over menus and complex systems. Balancing population, food, and space is something anyone can grasp, and watching your colony grow feels exceptionally rewarding. Usually at this point with Early Access games, we have thoughts on improvements that could be made, but we just want more of what's here. And, while it's currently PC only, it'd be *perfect* on Switch.





"Videogames don't need successful film adaptations to justify their existence"

Videogame movies reveal an insecurity within the industry, argues Jack Yarwood



The film industry has made several (mostly unsuccessful) attempts to adapt videogames into movies in the past, and it shows no signs of stopping any time soon. There are tons of new projects on the horizon, with plans already in motion to adapt both Tomb Raider (again) and Metal Gear Solid into films. But, while most people are excited by the prospect of seeing their favourite gaming characters on the big screen, I believe it highlights an insecurity about how we view videogames as a storytelling medium.

Whenever a new film project gets announced, we gamers always seem to stress how important it is that it does well, even when there's good reason to be sceptical about the likelihood of that. This is because many believe it's a necessary step to convince those outside of gaming that games can tell stories just as well as films do.

Videogames don't need successful film adaptations to justify their existence. They're already great at delivering messages on their own, and are even more versatile than films in doing so. Whereas movies desperately struggle to capture the language of games, videogames can easily incorporate filmmaking techniques, using cinematography and mise en scène to tell their stories. It's this flexibility that makes adapting games into films such a difficult task, as filmmakers have little to gain creatively, and plenty to lose in regards to interactivity and immersion.

> "VIDEOGAMES CAN EASILY INCORPORATE FILMMAKING TECHNIQUES TO TELL THEIR STORIES"

Nerha mind

The Assassin's Creed movie was one example where this was clearly an issue. For the most part, it was a pretty faithful reproduction of the game, hitting all the beats an audience might expect: Templars, assassinations, and incredible leaps from tall buildings. But that couldn't stop me from thinking about how much more engaged I'd be if it were a game and I had control over the events unfolding on-screen. Maybe then I would have felt more invested and actually be inclined to return to it in the future.

Videogames may never have their own Citizen Kane or 2001: A Space Odyssey to speak of, but film will never produce a Tetris, Minecraft, or Space Invaders. Those titles can only function properly as games and tell equally powerful and unique stories through the hard work and creativity of their players.

Does this mean we should stop adapting videogames into films? Not at all. But we need to stop putting them on a pedestal whenever a new one is released. Both film and games have their own place on the cultural spectrum, and neither needs the other to justify its existence or prove its worth. ■

STATS MAGIC The gaming month in facts and figures

425,000

The Overwatch League's opening day peaked at an incredible 425,000 concurrent viewers – though this was still some way behind DOTA 2's International, which managed five million.

45 MILLION

As of January, Epic Games' Fortnite Battle Royale has reached 45 million players. The game also managed to reach two million concurrent players.

£1.6 MILLION

Awesome Games Done Quick, the annual speedrunning event, raised a record-breaking £1.6 million for charity this year.





"For all the numerous dads, where are gaming's kickass mums?"

There's far too little maternal influence in our videogames, argues Sam Greer

It seems these days like every videogame protagonist, new or old, has graduated to the role of dad, usually with a daughter to look after. I'm grateful that the aspiration for many videogames in recent years, successful or not, has been to inject some real emotion into their stories. Games such as The Last Of Us and The Witcher 3 hold a special place in my heart, and a big part of that is down to the main characters and their roles as fathers.

Yet for all the numerous dads – and there are so, so many – where are videogames' mums?

It strikes me as especially odd given that the number one film videogames have pillaged for ideas over the decades is none other than Aliens. From Metroid, to Doom, to System Shock, to Halo, to Dead Space and hundreds more, a ludicrously huge portion of videogames owe so much of their style, ideas, and mechanics to this one film. Despite all that, however, despite all the things they've taken from this film, I can't think of a single videogame to feature a mother in the lead role. Even though Ellen Ripley is the defining presence of the Alien films and her motherhood is a huge part of her role in Aliens, to date videogames haven't dared to feature a protagonist in her mould.

Gimme maw!

This, of course, ties into the bigger problem of the representation of women. Though this has begun to shift in recent years, if only ever so slowly, the thought of casting a player in the role of someone like Ripley seems hamstrung by the idea of playing an older woman. There is every variety of dude in games, but women seem largely confined to being young and attractive. Often to absurd extremes. We've yet to have a AAA title offer us the chance to play as a grizzled, old, asskicking woman, but we've played the male equivalent dozens upon dozens of times.

All of which runs right back to the real problem at the back of this. Whether it's born of corporate agenda, an insistence that the videogames audience is still composed primarily of young males, or because not enough women are able to get into the positions dominated by men and change people's minds, the result is the same. Men dictate the videogames that get made. Our videogames are suffering, because they're telling the same stories about the same people.

The absence of mums is so striking because it's so obvious, but the lack of these characters reflects a much bigger problem. It's just the tip of the iceberg; I want us to see stories about every kind of person there is. But it won't change till there's a huge shift in the people who make our games. It's time for the industry to make way for those people and those stories. Devs, you've ripped off every other aspect of Aliens. Now give me your Ellen Ripleys. ■

"DEVS, YOU'VE RIPPED OFF EVERY OTHER ASPECT OF ALIENS. NOW GIVE ME ELLEN RIPLEY"



What's most tickling the team's fancy this month





ROBIN'S PICK

Skull & Bones

I've been reading about the real-life history of the Nassau pirate republic lately – home base of Edward 'Blackbeard' Teach, Charles Vane, and 'Calico' Jack Rackham – so it's fair to say I'm properly in the mood for pieces of eight, boarding actions, and yo-ho-hoing around the seas. With Ubisoft's Black Flag the best buccaneerin' game in recent memory, the developer's proven it's got the swashbuckling swagger to pull this sort of thing off, so I can't wait to get involved.

PS4, XO, PC – Autumn



SAM'S PICK

Jurassic World Evolution

The thing about releasing a management sim all about running our own Jurassic Park is that, for me at least, all I really want to do is let those poor, penned-up dinos loose. That's the fun part, if we're all being honest – who wants to spend time researching or building loos? It's time for womankind to take over the planet. So what if those women happen to be dinosaurs?

PS4, XO, PC – June



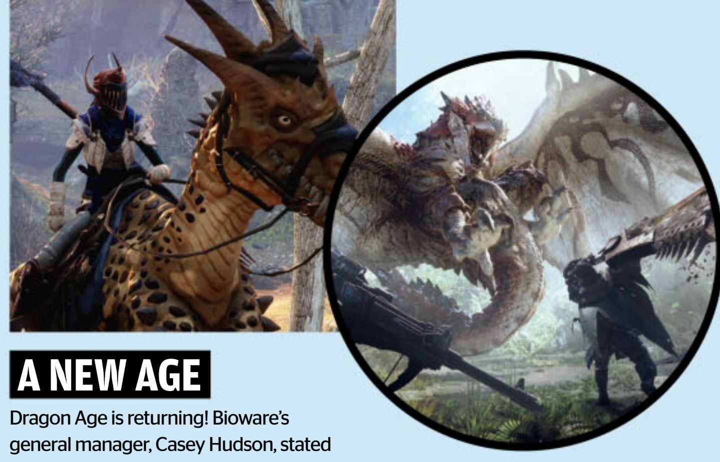
NO MERCY?

Blizzard is going to great lengths to clamp down on toxic players in Overwatch, with great results. Since the dev made it easier for console players to report problems, abusive chat in competitive matches has dropped by 17%. The studio's also using external sites such as YouTube to find and ban people guilty of poor behaviour before anyone's even reported them. Good work, Blizzard!



FIRST-PARTY ON

Still not decided whether to get Xbox Game Pass? Microsoft's announced that all first-party titles will be coming to the service on the day they're released, and that they'll stay on the list permanently. With Sea Of Thieves hoving into view, that should make your decision easy.



A NEW AGE

Dragon Age is returning! Bioware's general manager, Casey Hudson, stated on Twitter "…I think you'll be relieved to see what the team is working on. Story & character focused." It hasn't quite quelled fans' fears that microtransactions will feature, but we'll wait and see.

MONSTER SUCCESS

Capcom's Monster Hunter: World (review on p62) is 2018's first smash hit, racking up five million sales worldwide in its first three days on sale, making it the most successful in the series ever. What's more, those players are loving every minute – our lives and Twitter feeds are full of people discussing their hunts and adorable cat friends.

Topping the leaderboard this issue



No, we don't want to continue thanks



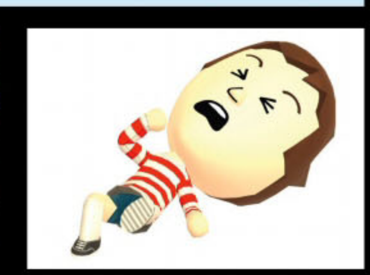
PARAGONE

Epic has a massive hit on its hands in the shape of Fortnite, with its 100-player battle royale mode, but that's proved bad news for the firm's other major title. MOBA Paragon was well-received but never attracted the same number of players, and Epic has announced it'll be closed on 29 April. Many of the staff on Paragon have already transferred to Fortnite, and Epic is offering a full refund to every Paragon player.



PRICE POINT

If you collect Reward points at retailer Game, bad news: the rate at which you earn them has been changed. From 25 January, customers have received one Reward point for every 25p spent – it used to be one per 12.5p spent, so they're twice as expensive to earn. At time of writing, however, you can still spend points the same way, so any you've earned before the change haven't decreased in value.



WOE IS MIITOMO

Mario Kart may be coming to mobile, but Nintendo's trimming back other phone-based offerings. On 9 May it's ending support for Miitomo, the strange game/social networking hybrid, which means you won't be able to view answers, messages or Miifotos, and your items, such as posters and clothing, will be inaccessible. You can transfer your Mii character to your Nintendo account, though.

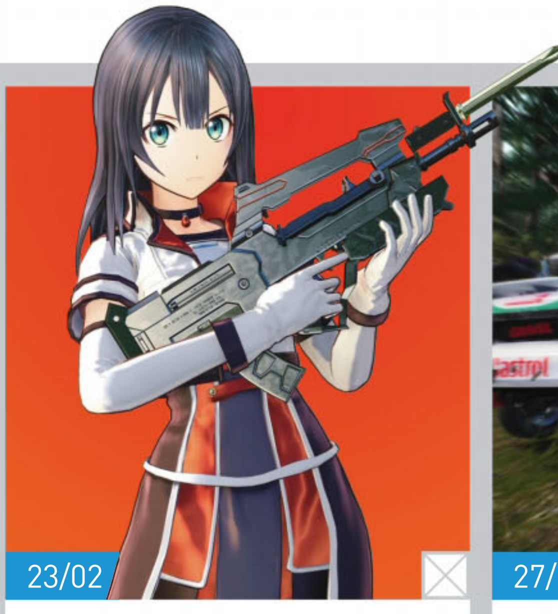


TOUGH TIMES

Small studio Bartlet Jones, which made arena shooter Drawn To Death, laid off most of its staff in January after the publisher of its current project ceased funding. Founder David Jaffe, the designer behind the original God Of War, plans to look into alternative funding methods for the game, though closing the studio entirely is, sadly, a possibility. We wish Bartlet Jones, and all its staff, past and present, all the best.

THE GM TO DO LIST

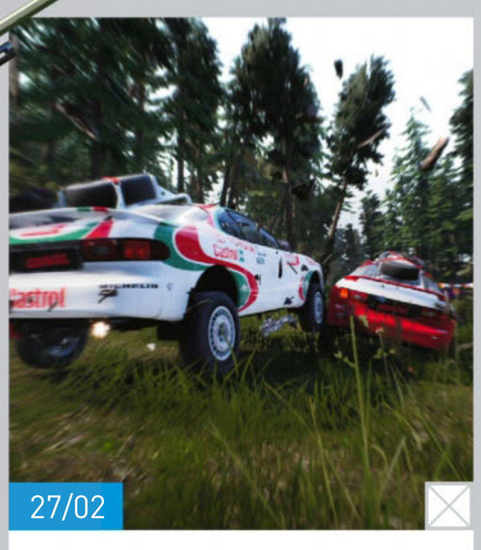
Crucial dates for your gaming diary. If you only do one thing this month, eat, but otherwise make a note of these events...



23/02

FIGHT THE BULLET

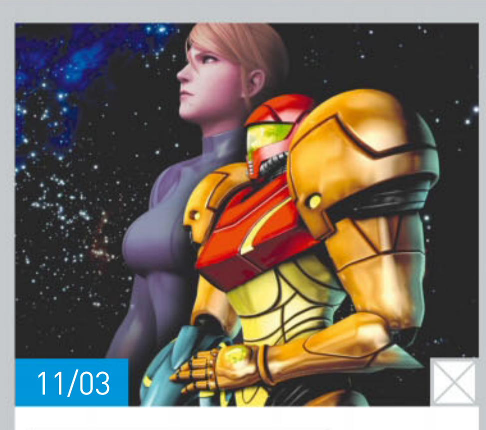
Snap into action as Sword Art Online: Fatal Bullet combines RPGing and shooting today.



27/02

QUIT THE ROAD, JACK

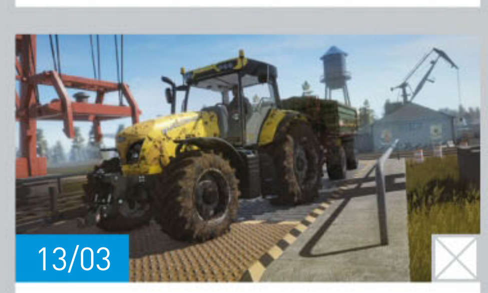
Gravel releases today, giving you the chance to reveal your mastery of off-road racing.



11/03

MOTHER LOADED

It's Mother's Day – time to apologise for the time you played Sonic instead of tidying your room.



13/03

A CALL TO FARMS

We've got a brand-new farming simulator; we'll give you the key. Pure Farming 2018, out now.



20/03

SIX AND VIOLENCE

Step back into Kazuma Kiryu's shoes, as Yakuza 6 menaces its way onto shop shelves.



20/03

GO ROGUE

Grab Assassin's Creed Rogue Remastered for PS4 and Xbox One today.



20/03

SEAS THE MOMENT

Press-gang your mates into crewing your ship and set sail in Sea Of Thieves, out today.



22/03

MONSTER MAG

GM328's on sale today, with vampires, werewolves, and Lovercraftian horrors inside...

INCOMING

Six big releases headed to a format near you...

01


Ni No Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom
Format PS4, PC
Out 23 March

02


MX Vs ATV All Out!
Format PS4, XO, PC
Out 27 March

03


We Happy Few
Format PS4, XO, PC
Out 13 April

04


Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze
Format Switch
Out 4 May

05


Conan Exiles
Format PS4, XO, PC
Out 8 May

06


Dark Souls Remastered
Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC
Out 25 May


GM
Feature
On The Cover!
GAMES MASTER
25TH
ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL
LOOKING BACK ON A QUARTER-CENTURY OF GAMING MAGIC



When GamesMaster magazine launched back at the start of 1993, in the shadow of a quirky new TV show, the team didn't even know if it would last the year. Now, 25 years later, it's still the best gaming publication in the business – and every single member of that original crew has been vindicated for the maverick geniuses they were.

Over 327 issues, we've always strived to bring you everything you needed to know about the hottest games around. Over that time, the definition of 'hottest', and in some cases 'games', has perhaps changed, but our passion for this fantastic, always surprising, totally weird industry has been immutable.

In that spirit, we knew that our 25th anniversary issue couldn't just be about us – it had to be about the games too. Without them, we'd just be Master magazine, and no-one would read that. So read on for our 25 favourite games of the last quarter-century, one for each of those fantastic years, and a smattering of our favourite moments in gaming from this glorious era in which we've been on shelves.

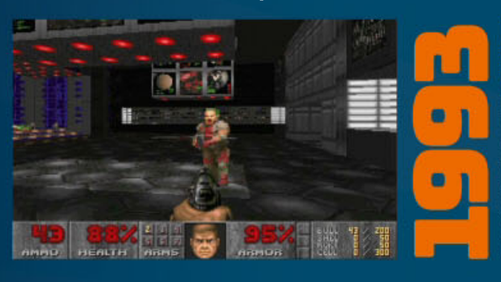
Of course, we can't help but be a *little* egotistical. It is our birthday, after all. So read on for plenty of GamesMaster nostalgia too, including an interview with Dave 'Games Animal' Perry himself. Enjoy – and here's to another 25.

HALL OF FAME

25 years of gaming goodness

What a difference 25 years make. We've gone from an era of a super-popular Nintendo machine with cartridge-based games to... a super-popular Nintendo machine with cartridge-based games *that's also portable*.

We've also seen thousands of games released, with hundreds of true greats among them. As we're feeling so nostalgic, we've decided to pick the best 25 games of GamesMaster's lifetime – one for each year. And trust us, this was *very* difficult.



1993

Doom

Developer Id Software
Publisher Id Software
Format PC
Not the original first-person shooter, just the one that ripped up the rulebook and single-handedly pushed gaming in a bold, exciting new direction. Without Doom, modern gaming wouldn't exist.





Sensible World Of Soccer

Developer Sensible Software
Publisher Renegade **Format** Amiga
A football game imbued with such passion, skilful creation, and a magnificent sense of fun we had never seen before – and we've never seen since. SWOS ruled 1994.

1995

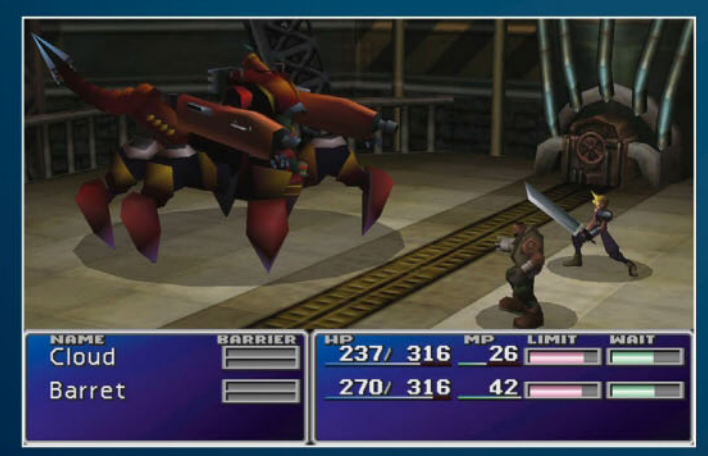
Chrono Trigger

Developer Square **Publisher** Square
Format SNES
Oddly absent from the SNES Classic, Chrono Trigger is one of Square's best games hands-down, and a JRPG we still can't get enough of today.

1996

Super Mario 64

Developer Nintendo **Publisher** Nintendo
Format N64
And just like that, Nintendo decided to change the medium forever. Mario 64 reinvented gaming's most beloved character in absolutely the best way possible.



1997

Final Fantasy VII

Developer Square **Publisher** Sony **Format** PlayStation
The game that made RPGs popular, the impact of FFVII cannot be understated. It helps that it's a quality example of the genre, and one that's still popular to this day.

1998

Pokémon Red and Blue

Developer Game Freak **Publisher** Nintendo **Format** Game Boy
The one(s) that started the whole thing off, Pokémon took a couple of years to arrive in English-speaking countries, but when it did it *took over*. This was the game that caught us all.

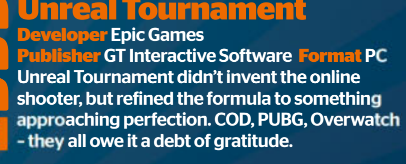
MY FAVOURITE GM MEMORY



Getting the sales figures for issue one was a pretty special moment. We had this amazing TV tie-in, but the show hadn't been on air for six months. Some people said our pages were too dark and the design was too crowded, and some questioned if there was any appetite for another multi-format magazine at all. That first issue sold 232,000 copies, making us the biggest games magazine in the country from day one. I remember thinking "If we're lucky we might be able to keep this going for a couple of years".

JIM DOUGLAS
Editor 1992 - 1993





1999 Unreal Tournament

Developer Epic Games
Publisher GT Interactive Software **Format** PC
Unreal Tournament didn't invent the online shooter, but refined the formula to something approaching perfection. COD, PUBG, Overwatch - they all owe it a debt of gratitude.

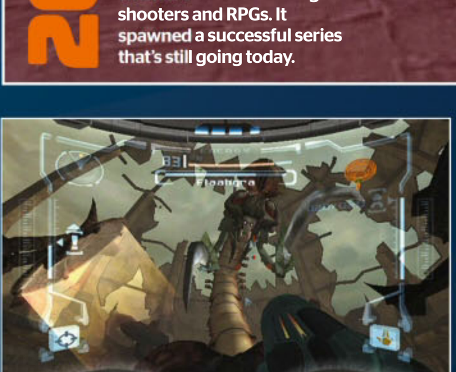
2000 Deus Ex

Developer Ion Storm
Publisher Eidos Interactive
Format PC
System Shock set the ball rolling, but it was Deus Ex that hit it out of the park when it came to blending shooters and RPGs. It spawned a successful series that's still going today.



2001 Grand Theft Auto III

Developer DMA Design **Publisher** Rockstar Games **Format** PS2
The world was unprepared for just how revelatory GTA III ended up being, and we're still feeling the shockwaves today. Categorically one of the absolute best of all time.



2002 Metroid Prime

Developer Retro Studios **Publisher** Nintendo
Format GameCube
When Nintendo wants to make an FPS, it makes the best one of the year - with seeming ease. Metroid Prime was inventive, creative and a heck of a lot of fun.



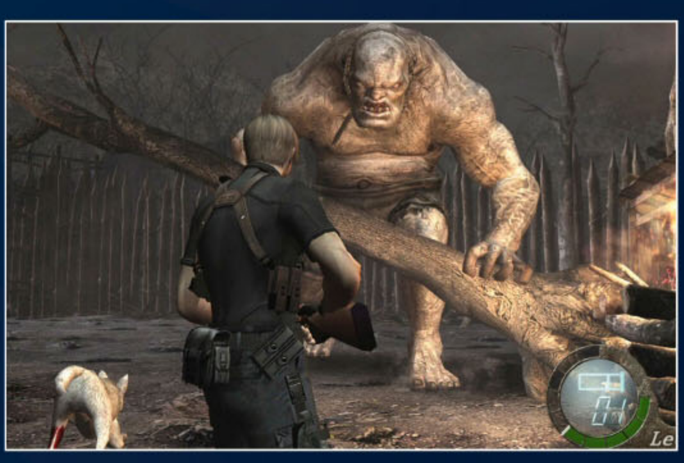
2003 Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic

Developer BioWare **Publisher** LucasArts
Format Xbox, PC
KOTOR blew away our low expectations of a movie tie-in with a mature, deep story of (laser) swords and (force-powered) souls.



2004 Half-Life 2

Developer Valve Corporation **Publisher** Valve Corporation **Format** PC
2004 was an incredible year for games, no doubt (GTA: San Andreas, Halo 2, and Burnout 3 were also big releases), but Half-Life 2 was - and is - next level stuff. Every other developer is *still* playing catch up.



2005 Resident Evil 4

Developer Capcom Production **Publisher** Capcom
Format GameCube, PS2
Not only did Resi 4 revitalise Capcom's then-flagging zombie-'em-up, it made all of gaming aspire to be even half as good as it was.

2006 Wii Sports

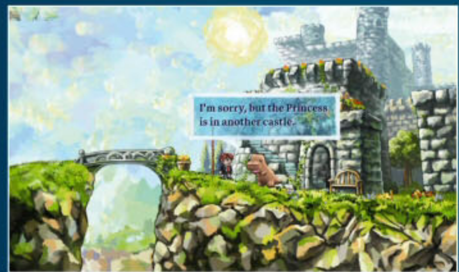
Developer Nintendo
Publisher Nintendo **Format** Wii

Controversial? Absolutely not. Wii Sports was the game played and loved by everybody who touched it, and tens – if not hundreds – of millions touched it in 2006.

2007 Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Developer Infinity Ward
Publisher Activision
Format 360, PS3, PC

Before COD became the punchline to a joke about annual releases, there was Modern Warfare. It invented the blockbuster campaign, and perfected the fast-paced multiplayer game we still enjoy today.





2008 Braid

Developer Number None **Publisher** Microsoft Game Studios **Format** 360

There was a time when independently-made games weren't available much – or at all – on console. Braid changed all of that, and the indie revolution owes a lot to this smart platformer.



2009 Minecraft

Developer Mojang **Publisher** Mojang
Format PC

It spent a couple of years being tweaked, but 2009 was the year when Minecraft first became available. You may have heard of it. Pretty important stuff, apparently.



2010 Mass Effect 2

Developer BioWare **Publisher** EA
Format 360, PC

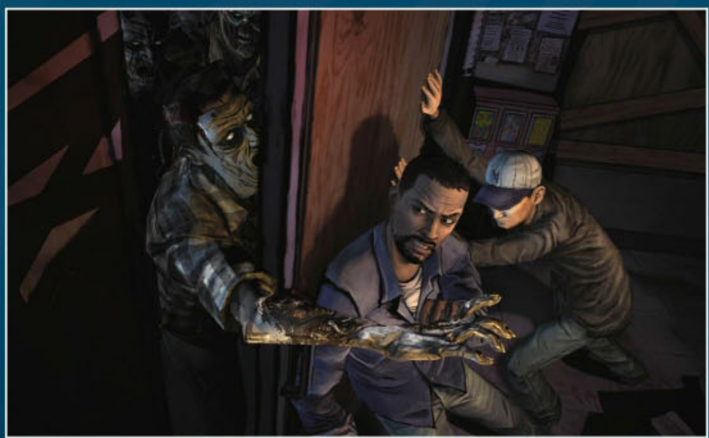
The exact moment RPGs stopped being solely for stat-obsessed, PC-only ultra-fans, Mass Effect 2 combined BioWare's genre knowledge with a superb story and exciting gunplay.



2011 The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

Developer Bethesda Game Studios **Publisher** Bethesda Game Studios
Format 360, PS3, PC

It's pushing seven years old, and is still being rereleased, played, and *enjoyed* around the world. Skyrim was, is, forever will be one of the best.



2012 The Walking Dead

Developer Telltale Games **Publisher** Telltale Games
Format 360, PS3, PC, Mobile

In 2012 many of us began a story-led journey of zombies and interpersonal relationships. Little did we know a year later we'd all be in floods of tears.

MY FAVOURITE GM MEMORY



My favourite memories of working on GM would never fit in this space. Which is very GamesMaster. We always had too many games and not enough pages. Edited highlights would be: interviewing Shigeru Miyamoto, seeing a prototype Xbox when it was a big chrome X, getting the exclusive review of GTA 3, playing Wii before it was unveiled at E3, Resident Evil 4, all the console launches, and every time I annoyed someone on Team GM by serving underarm on Virtua Tennis on the Dreamcast.

ROBIN ALWAY
EDITOR 2000-2007, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF 2007-2013





2013 Grand Theft Auto V

Developer Rockstar North
Publisher Rockstar Games
Format 360, PS3

How could it not be? The intervening GTAs were all superb, but it was the fifth that reinvented everything so spectacularly – as well as adding a little thing called GTA Online.



2014 Mario Kart 8

Developer Nintendo **Publisher** Nintendo
Format Wii U

By the eighth game you should be out of ideas – that is, unless you're Nintendo and you decide to make your ageing series, once again, the best multiplayer game on the market.



2015 The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

Developer CD Projekt Red **Publisher** CD Projekt **Format** PS4, XO, PC

Third time was the charm for The Witcher, with Wild Hunt providing both one of the best RPG experiences in memory *and* doing gangbusters sales-wise. Everybody won in 2015.

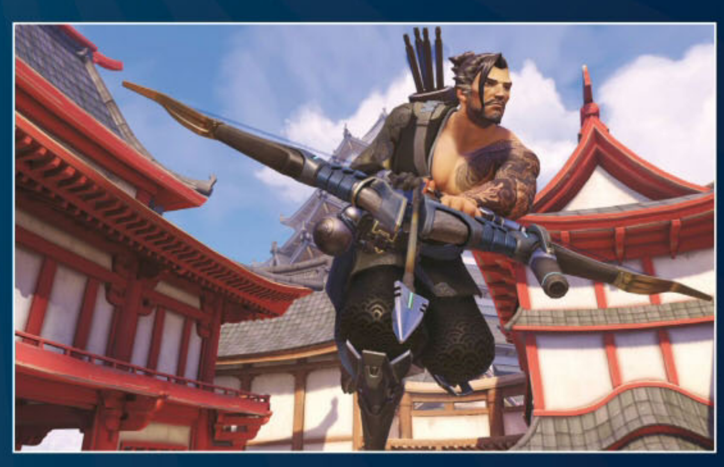


MY FAVOURITE GM MEMORY



As a massive WWE fan, getting to travel to Summerslam and sit down with Stone Cold Steve Austin for a one-on-one interview isn't just a standout memory of my time on GamesMaster, it's one of my favourite moments *ever*. Yet the coolest part of working at GM was the chance to report on a new console generation: Wii U, PS4, and Xbox One all arrived during my spell on the mag. Nobody has ever equalled GamesMaster's enthusiasm for new consoles, and so it was a privilege to play a small part in that legacy.

MATTHEW PELLETT
EDITOR 2013 – 2014



2016 Overwatch

Developer Blizzard Entertainment **Publisher** Blizzard Entertainment
Format PS4, XO, PC

When tired of World Of Warcraft, Blizzard instead decided to focus on the best team-based online shooter ever made. Because why not, eh?



2017 The Legend Of Zelda: Breath Of The Wild

Developer: Nintendo **Publisher:** Nintendo **Format:** Switch, Wii U

What a way to launch a new console – Breath Of The Wild will be mentioned in every breath, wild or not, for the however long this thing we call gaming manages to continue. A true, instant, classic.

The first ever GM challenge was to gather 50 coins in two minutes in Super Mario Bros 3.

BEST IN SHOW

A TV programme like no other

THE OTHER GOLDEN JOYSTICK

The awards ceremony might be worthy of praise in its own right, but another legend in golden joystick form was GamesMaster's award for successful competitors. Beat a challenge and you were handed a Definitely Very Expensive, solid gold joystick for your efforts. (We are legally obliged to point out at this point it was neither expensive nor real gold.)

The GamesMaster TV show ran for seven series, from 1992 to 1998, and is still fondly remembered as some of the best gaming-related content ever to grace our screens – especially by our most vocal Twitter followers. With the desire to reminisce in our hearts, we tracked down a key member of the GM television team to have a chat – one of the five men who created the show and, perhaps, GamesMaster's most iconic co-presenter: Dave 'Games Animal' Perry.

HOW DID GAMESMASTER COME ABOUT?

Well, famously the show was inspired by Jane Hewland's son Harry. Jane was the woman behind independent production company Hewland International, and a real force to be reckoned with. I believe she had watched her son's fascination with early games consoles, and particularly a game called Duck Hunt. Never slow to spot an opportunity, she could see the potential behind the imminent games boom and set about looking at how to create a TV show to capture the zeitgeist.

As a magazine journalist at the time, I was offered a position in the production team as a games expert/researcher. It meant taking a cut in wages and travelling for almost two hours a day into the Isle Of Dogs, in London, to work at the show's trendy new offices... but it was worth it! The original team put together by Jane to create the show from the ground up was Adam Wood (producer), Cameron McAllister (director), me (games researcher), Steve Carsey (games researcher) and Chris Kelly (celebrity booker).

We had nothing to work with, as a show of this kind had never been done before, so everything we did was being done for the first time. We were genuine pioneers, which is a very rare thing indeed. And

THE ODD SQUAD

We've done a lot of covers over the last 25 years – and we have to admit, some of them have been a little weird...



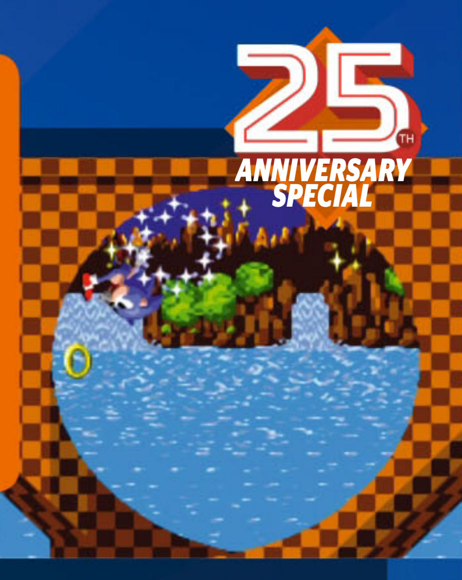
Issue 13
This month's cover star? Er, a magic wand, to celebrate Young Merlin and Aladdin. Worth picking up for the Zool calendar.



Issue 24
Did you know GamesMaster was the first magazine to ever physically punch its readers in the face? We had to use special ink.



Issue 42
Bet you didn't know that the skinny salami man from the Peperami adverts was once on GM's cover, alongside MDK.



Duck Hunt, the NES lightgun game that inspired the show. Is there anything Ninty can't start?

MY FAVOURITE GM MEMORY

One thing that sticks in my mind is the utter mania of putting together issue 287's '100 Greatest Games of 2015' feature. In planning our big preview of the year to come we figured that 40 or 50 games, like other mags tended to do, just wouldn't be sufficiently stressful, so decided to both double the workload *and* try to squeeze it into the ten-day production cycle before the office shut down for Christmas. Sometimes my dreams are still haunted by playing flatplan Tetris with all those printouts...

JOEL GREGORY
EDITOR 2014 - 2015

something I remain massively proud of.

WHAT WAS WORKING ON GAMESMASTER LIKE?

Some of the greatest moments of my professional life, and also some of the most frustrating. We did something that had never been done before, so we were groundbreaking, and that comes with its own very unique assortment of pressures and senses of great achievement. All these years later it is still considered the best videogames TV show ever. We did that.

HOW DID YOU BRING IT ALL TOGETHER EACH WEEK – REVIEWS, CELEB GUESTS, AND CHALLENGES?

In the early days we all sat down and decided which games the viewers would most be interested in and which would make the best challenges. Later on, I have no idea... as I was simply hired to go along and help present and co-present on the shows and those decisions had all been pre-made at Hewland.

WHO WAS YOUR FAVOURITE OF THE CELEBS?

I enjoyed working with Take That, and Frank Bruno was always very, very friendly. But if I'm honest I don't really have any that particularly stand out. Vinnie Jones was a real character to try to teach how to play FIFA. Genuine rage when things didn't go his way on the screen. The one that got away was George Best. I was really looking forward to working with him on the very first series, but ultimately the producers decided he might be too unpredictable and so didn't use him. I was gutted.

DO YOU EVER MISS IT?

Yes. I miss the early seasons, when the show was still exciting to be a part of and we were so excited about being on television. Some of the later seasons became less fun and more of a slog. But I will always have an affection for the show. I still view it as my baby.

DO YOU THINK IT WOULD WORK IF IT WERE BROUGHT BACK TODAY?

Yes, I don't see why not. With a talented, hungry, and edgy young team behind it, like in the early days. You would need to look back at the first two seasons and the teams behind them as a blueprint. The secret behind GamesMaster in the early days was that it never tried to be cool. We always knew that that would be its downfall. It was quirky and full of eccentricities and that was why it worked so well. If people decide it's cool, then great, but if you try too hard to be cool it never works.

DOES GAMESMASTER HAVE ANY IMPACT ON YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE THESE DAYS?

Yes, it really does. Almost every day someone recognises me from the show, or wants to tell me about how much GamesMaster meant to them when they were younger. Which I love. I also still get trolled for the Super Mario 64 incident in Season 6. But that has long since stopped bothering me. I am always happy to pose for selfies with old games fans – and young ones. I am a retro gaming icon, and I love it!

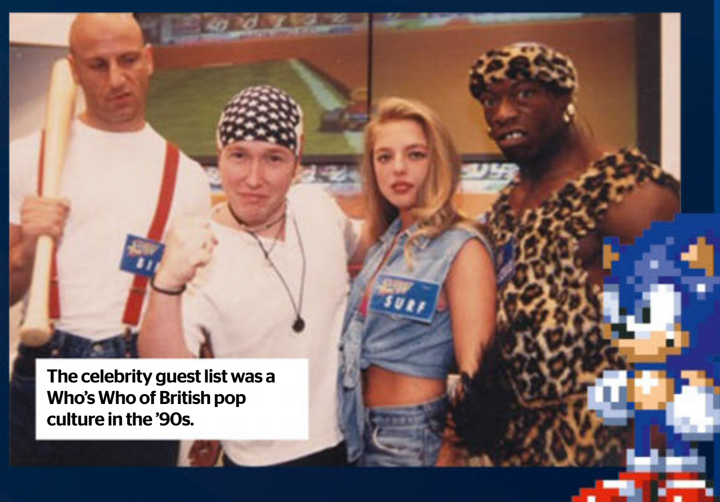
THE FACES OF GM

Aside from the luminaries on this page, GamesMaster is best known for two others: Sir Patrick Moore as the titular floating head of all knowledge, and the wonderfully acerbic Dominik Diamond – both of whom made the show as legendary as it is. Oh, and there was Dexter Fletcher too, but we don't talk about that around here...









The celebrity guest list was a Who's Who of British pop culture in the '90s.



Issue 50
In addition to contributing his 'Big Purple Column', Dominik Diamond was an occasional cover star. 'Hello Sailor' indeed.



Issue 111
The Rock's never looked better. In the 2000s, it was legally mandated that we did at least four pro wrestling covers per year.



Issue 167
Remember when Shadow The Hedgehog was the height of cool? GM remembers. Newsflash: he still is.



Issue 228
Yes, really – this issue had actual 3D pages that you had to read with special glasses, to "eye-popping" effect.



1994 PlayStation releases in Japan

While we did have to wait almost a year for it to hit elsewhere, PlayStation's Japanese launch was the first chance for many people to get their hands on Sony's first console. Nobody would have predicted the force of nature it would become, thanks in no small part to incredible launch title Ridge Racer.

1993 GamesMaster launches

Putting out its first issue a year after the television show, a certain magazine you may have heard of hit the stands and immediately blew thousands of gaming fans away with its packed features and expert gaming tips. The first issue contained a full 50 pages of reviews – and they were dense pages back then.

1995 E3 begins

Initially a gathering of developers showing their wares to publishers, E3 has since developed into a giant event inviting the public and taking over downtown LA for a week every year. Love it or hate it, there's no doubting the impact E3 has on the gaming calendar – or the excitement it generates around upcoming titles every year.

1998 Sega reinvents gaming; fails

Ask any gaming fan of the late '90s what makes them saddest and, after wiping away a particularly wet tear, they'll likely mutter something about the Dreamcast. Sega's final console was ahead of its time – online play as standard, LCD screens on your controller via memory card, VGA connectivity – it's never anything other than sad this great machine saw the end of Sega as a hardware company.

GOLDEN YEARS

A quarter-century of highs, lows, and WMDs

It's not just the games – over the past 25 years loads has happened *outside* of just playing them. We didn't just want to list the best and biggest moments, and we couldn't fit absolutely everything that happened in – so here are just ten moments in the past quarter century of gaming that we could never forget. And believe us, we've tried.

2000 Saddam and the PS2

No memory from the millennium year beats that of news reports breathlessly regaling us all with tales of Saddam Hussein – then both alive and still very much in charge of Iraq – stockpiling thousands of PlayStation 2s in order to link them together to create a drone-powering supercomputer. This… did not end up happening.





2002 Xbox Live opens its doors

Dreamcast may have gotten there first, but Microsoft learned from Sega's mistakes and introduced online console play to the masses with Xbox Live. Still going strong to this day, the subscription service made taking your console onto the internet a thing of ease and brought us all, as gaming fans, closer together. Except for those who couldn't afford it.

2005 Hot Coffee

A few hidden files, an innocuously named mod, and before we knew it we were embroiled in one of the biggest scandals in gaming history. GTA: San Andreas' infamous sex minigame proved a watershed moment in moral panic that ended up roping in everyone from Hilary Clinton to Jack Thompson, and cemented Rockstar's bad boy image for all time.

MY FAVOURITE GM MEMORY



My life can be measured in GamesMaster. There were the earliest days, when I was but a sprog, sprawled across a living room carpet watching Sir Patrick Moore dole out tips for Zelda (and only half understanding Dominik Diamond's double entendres). Then there were the golden years, starting on the team as staff writer, before evolving Pokémon-style into a games editor and then editor. Then there's now, where not a day goes by that I don't reminisce about scrambling together papercraft Dig-Dug arcade machines for a free gift that month, or popping off to meet Miyamoto to chat about Pikmin.

MATT SAKURAOKA-GILMAN
EDITOR 2015 – 2016



2007 The rise of Rock Band

The Guitar Hero revolution led inevitably to full band-based games, and to equally inevitable parties focused on getting people together to play Rock Band or Guitar Hero World Tour, pretending they were talented. They were great days, with loads of people not normally into games happily getting involved. Back then it seemed like plastic instruments would be around forever...







2013 Sony and Microsoft kick off the current generation

Sony's PlayStation and Microsoft's Xbox have been in an arms race since the early noughties, so when 2013 rolled about we couldn't wait to see what each could do. Since the PS4 and Xbox One's release – within a couple of weeks or each other – every day's been a great day to be into games. Especially the day when The Witcher 3 came out.

2017 Nintendo Switches things up

Never content to be outdone, Nintendo quietly went back to the drawing board after the failure of Wii U. Experienced gaming fans know never to write Ninty off – it's always got another trick up its sleeve. Switch was announced and released within the space of a few months, and suddenly – before we even knew what was happening – we had a contender for greatest games machine ever on (and in) our hands. What. A. Console.

In Japan, the series' title is literally translated 'Like A Dragon', as in 'Kiryu kicks heads in like a dragon'.

"KAMUROCHO HAS NEVER FELT MORE ALIVE, THANKS TO THE ALL-NEW DRAGON ENGINE"




Besides getting caught up in another criminal conspiracy, you've also got a new responsibilities occupying your time. Like babysitting. No, really.



GM MOST WANTED

Format PS4 **Publisher** Sega
Developer Sega **ETA** 20 March

YAKUZA 6: THE SONG OF LIFE

Just when we thought we were out, they pull us back in...



The final chapter in Sega's decade-long crime saga is almost here. While the brawling JRPG has grown bloated over time, with more playable characters and even more convoluted criminal conspiracies, our hands-on of Yakuza 6's opening hours also shows Sega knows how to dial things back to a more personal level.

After all, the series has been about the long redemption story of Kazuma Kiryu, an ex-yakuza who's been trying to cut ties with his Tokyo criminal family, the Tojo clan, and become the respectable father figure to the children of Okinawa orphanage Morning Glory.

Central to Kiryu's life has been his adopted daughter Haruka, last seen in Yakuza 5 pursuing her dream of becoming a pop idol. But the scandal and gossip that follows once she gives up that dream and reveals her yakuza associations ends up forcing her to go on the run. Suddenly three years later, we find Haruka not only fighting for her life after a suspicious hit-and-run, but with a baby in tow!

Basically, for newcomers, or those who've just rolled in from the fun times of '80s-set prequel Yakuza 0, there's a major shift in tone and a shedload of backstory to catch up on, which the opening moments have a hard time trying to unpack, following straight after the events of the last game. Without boring you with yakuza politics, the latest sees Kiryu, the sole playable protagonist this time around, trying to uncover what happened to Haruka over the past three years, while also getting dragged into another gang war, involving some new and ruthless Chinese Triads. All that lot conspires to make him return to his old stomping ground, Tokyo's fictional red light district of Kamurocho.

Streets of age

It's a wonder that a series can keep taking us back to the same neighbourhood made up of just 17 blocks without the games or location ever getting dull. As we get the chance to return once again in





The series' attention to detail is only matched by its attention to flights of fancy, as this karaoke session proves. Thankfully, you don't have to sing for real.

Lost in distraction

A few ways to kill time with Kiryu

Hostess bar

Spend quality time drinking and flirting with the charming hostesses. Get to know a hostess better and you can even take her out on some fun dates. Just don't be a creep about it, okay? They're nice girls.



Gym

Kiryu may already have a proper bod, but everyone's got to stay in shape, right? The new Rizap gym is the place for it. Besides lifting weights, your personal trainer even gives nutritional advice.



Batting cage

Kamurocho's batting centre is still in business, and has been since the very first game. You actually get a pitcher instead of a machine to hurl some fast baseballs your way. Go for those home runs!



Eating out

You can't have a Japan simulator without all the delicious cuisine. There are plenty of restaurants to choose from, which recover health and boost other stats. But careful, your stomach can only handle so much.



our hands-on, we realise Kamurocho has never felt more alive, thanks to the all-new Dragon Engine that Yakuza 6 is running on. As impressive as Yakuza 0 and Kiwami (the recent remake of the first game) are, they're running on last-gen technology (both were also released for PS3 in Japan).

Yakuza 6 unleashes all the current-gen power it can muster, making the action seamless. Gone are loading screens when entering and leaving buildings, making us feel like Kiryu's faster and more furious than ever, while the random battle equivalent of brawls with street thugs flow faster and over wider areas. In the best combination, fights even spill over into other businesses, as windows smash, terrified staff duck behind the counter, and the furniture becomes new weapons for us to hurl at our assailants.

95% complete

Extra attention to detail has also gone into the audio. Most likely due to budget constraints, past Yakuza games have only been partially voiced, which often meant that even key plot scenes would involve scrolling through text rather than listening to dialogue. Now even the most minor of side characters have fully recorded voice lines, putting Yakuza 6 on par with the level of immersion you'd expect from the typical big-budget western release.

The new tech does come with a trade-off. While Yakuza 0 and Kiwami ran on an older engine, the results on PS4 were super-polished in 1080p running at 60fps. In a contradictory way, the new engine feels like an initial step down in performance when jumping straight from the other games, with visual details sometimes suffering from lower resolution, screen-tearing, and the dramatically halved frame-rate, which occasionally drops below 30fps based on our time with it on a standard PS4. If that alarms you, don't worry – it's about on a par with the performance of other power-hungry open world games such as The Witcher 3 and Horizon. Now that doesn't sound so bad, does it?

The key combat system in Yakuza 6 remains a brutal and chaotic joy, delivered with simple combos strung together from light, heavy attacks and grabs, while boosting your heat gauge allows you to trigger a more bone-crunching move to rearrange a thug's face. Kiryu doesn't have the ability to switch to different fighting styles like he did in Yakuza 0, but in our session we do have access to a couple of new moves, including a grab that spins an enemy around into the path of surrounding goons – great for crowd control. Also new is the option to squeeze R2 to activate 'Extreme Heat' mode, which gives us a temporary power boost and the chance to round off a combo with a mashable finisher.

"THE OFTEN-BIZARRE SIDE-QUESTS AND MINIGAMES HAVE BECOME A DEFINING HIGHLIGHT OF THE SERIES… THE BEST KIND OF FLUFF"

Quest boy

Of course, street brawls only make up a fraction of what Yakuza games have to offer: half the fun is undertaking the quintessentially Japanese side quests and minigames. It's the sort of thing that would feel completely out of place, like pointless filler, in other



No, *you're* crying! Seriously though, seeing Kiryu taking care of his orphan family shows how much heart is under all that gangster muscle.



Not just shameless product placement – the Club Sega arcade is just one of many places you can visit to take time out from the story.

Kamurocho's always been a bustling neighbourhood, but the sights and sounds of other people going about their day feels even more immersive.

Street punks are always trying to ruin your day. You can run from them, but honestly, it's their mistake for picking a fight with Kiryu.

games, yet the often-bizarre encounters have here become a defining highlight of the series. In other words, it's the best kind of fluff, literally so when we discover a newly opened cat café. In this particular case, it's a little disappointing to find the place rather lacking in its specialty, but it does however make a (purrrrfect) excuse to kickstart a side quest of finding stray cats in the city.

A leisurely wander around town to refamiliarise ourselves reveals other old pleasures are present and correct (see 'Lost in distraction', opposite). A major highlight is the Club Sega arcade, which houses 1980s classics such as Out Run and Hang-On. However, the real surprise comes from the smaller arcade on a corner, which almost threatens to derail our demo time when we discover it has fully playable versions of Virtua Fighter 5: Final Showdown and Puyo Puyo (the final game will also allow for ultra-addictive two-player matches).

And this is just a fraction of the full game's offerings. Kiryu's quest takes him to the game's new major locale in Hiroshima, way out in the west of Honshu, which, we're promised, will be teeming with just as many fascinating sights to explore and quests to take on. But for now, it feels great stepping back into Kamurocho, a place still so packed with wonder, surprises, and yes, plenty of passing yakuza waiting to taste the pavement. ■ ***Alan Wen***

GM Instant Reaction

+ The streets of Kamurocho feel more alive than ever, with exploration, combat, and distractions flowing together.

– As it's the final instalment in a long-running series, newcomers may have a tough time catching up on the backstory.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

A fitting conclusion to Japan's most epic gangster saga.



You can seamlessly shop and dine, and get into fights. But don't go picking quarrels inside places unless you want to get banned.



"I know you like playing with your toys, but we have to put them away nicely and fight now."

Format PC **Developer** Creative Assembly
Publisher Sega **ETA** Autumn

TOTAL WAR: THREE KINGDOMS

Wizards and elves are out, warlords and emperors are in



To quote a well-known song: "War, huh! Yeah. What is it good for? Absolutely nothing apart from forming the basis for real-time strategy games that serve both educational and entertainment purposes." At least, we *think* that's how it went. Excuse us, we are 25 magazine years old (that's 147 in human years).

Leaving the fantasy of Warhammer behind, Creative Assembly once more turns to the long, long history of humans being horrible to one another for inspiration. For the first time, the series visits ancient China. The year 190CE (that's AD to you and us), to be precise, just as China was about to split into the states of Wei, Shu, and Wu. Dynasty Warriors fans will know this period well. Fun fact: although the states are known as the three kingdoms, each was actually presided over by an emperor, not a king. See? You're learning things already!

The plot of the game follows real events in that very year, whereby the child emperor Xian is being used by the warlord Dong Zhuo to rule in a really not very nice way. But fear not! Also as happened in real life, a coalition is formed to fight this nasty chap, ancient Chinese military stylee. Yet this coalition will be threatened from within by good ol' human ambition, as everyone decides they're the chap to be the next emperor.

70% complete

Me old China

Ancient China is fascinating, a turbulent time and place that we're happy to see the Total War series explore. Creative Assembly has some awesome RTS titles under its proverbial belt, and its dedication to authenticity should work out very nicely here. The announcement trailer, though sadly devoid of gameplay footage, promises detailed time-and-place-appropriate armour and weapons. Even the character models of named individuals appear to have been carefully crafted according to the images history has left us of them.

Prepare to once again command an army of warriors like some kind of god of war (no, not that one). Three kingdoms come, thy will be done. ■ ***Luke Kemp***

GM Instant Reaction

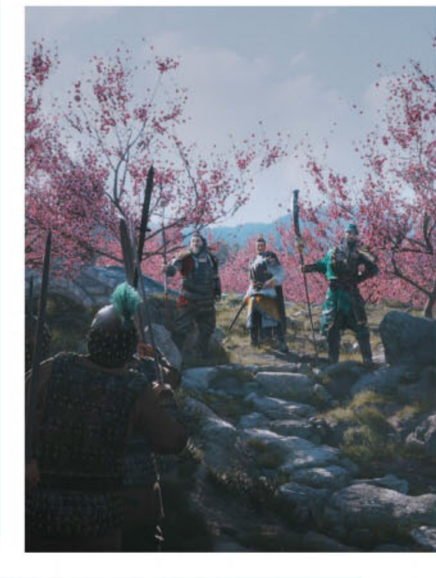
+ We're excited to see Total War go back to human history, and ancient China is a brilliant choice of setting.

– As great as previous entries in the series are, we've yet to see how this one will distinguish itself gameplay-wise.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 **4** 5

If accurate, this could be superb... but we need to see more.





The chap so large that his horse is at an angle is Dong Zhuo. Do not fear his beard, hero. Fear his infamous brutality and monstrous sense of ambition.

Format Switch **Publisher** Nintendo
Developer HAL Laboratory **ETA** 16 March



KIRBY: STAR ALLIES

Everything is cool when you're part of Kirby's team



As though swallowing his enemies and absorbing their powers isn't horrifying enough, Kirby can now wrap them in a cocoon of webbing. Beneath that cute exterior lies a monster that must be stopped – though not before meeting all his new friends in his multi-coloured Switch debut.

In the pink one's latest adventure he's all about the love – making friends is the name of the game. Kirby's joined by a small troupe of allies he turns into collaborators called 'helpers' with the power of a heart. Each helper offers a skillset that can be manipulated depending on who else is in the group and what abilities Kirby has on hand. For example, combine water and a freezing blast to create the piercing Icicle Lance, or do a cyclone super-jump that stuns enemies by manipulating the wind. And Kirby has new tricks of his own, too. Aside from shooting web a la Spider-Man, he can become an 'artist', where he draws a previously met foe, which then comes alive and does some stomping for him.

Levels are traversed by mixing and matching all these powers, harnessing the values of friendship and co-operation in order to succeed. There's also co-op for up to four players, allowing you to feel the love in real life (and disappointment at how not good your mates are).

95% complete

Love conquers all

Opposing Kirby's rainbow cavalcade is a group of black- and blue-clad villains led by rival Meta-Knight. Encounters will test your arsenal up to that point, meaning the truest path to victory comes from playing nice and seeing the value in everything. Nintend's keeping story details under wraps, but the tease of "an unknown deep-space threat" is ominous. As ominous as Kirby gets, at least.

Not that playing as a walking, talking pink marshmallow saving a place called Dreamland needs much narrative. Y'know, on second thought, maybe he's not so scary. ■ ***Anthony McGlynn***







Nothing like skewering common enemies to bring friends – and special powers – together.

GM Instant Reaction

+ The group dynamic gives the formula an invigorating twist that should make the platforming and puzzling feel fresh.

– The amount of action on screen looks like it might become unruly and distracting at times, especially with four players.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 **4** 5

Another unique platformer from an unheralded lord of the genre.







Kirby enlists allies by throwing hearts at them, literally attacking them with love. That's both adorable and a bit horrifying.



Hold on, could this secretly be a Kirby vs Katamari Damacy spin-off game? Well, no, it definitely isn't. But we can dream, right?



Format PC **Publisher** Numantian Games **Developer** Numantian Games **ETA** Autumn

THEY ARE BILLIONS

Your chances of surviving are a billion to one

Lurching out of nowhere, this survival strategy mash-up, available in Early Access, could already be a strong contender for the most novel title of 2018. The premise is simple: You control a colony of survivors sometime after the apocalypse, trying to rebuild while also fending of endless hordes of the undead. You must gather resources, grow your population, and keep them fed, but also construct defences to keep it all safe.

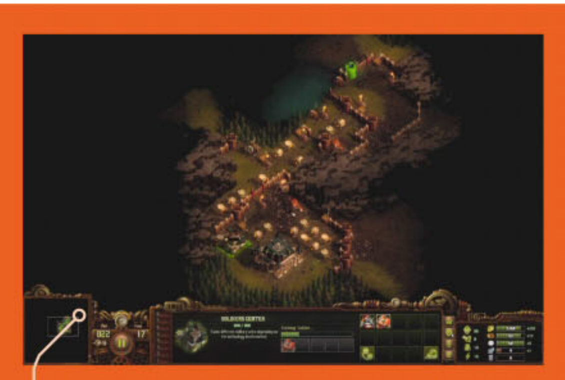
Simplicity is what makes They Are Billions work so well. The stakes and goals are clear, but how you tackle things is completely up to you. Your options early on in the game are straightforward. You'll only be seeking to gather the basic resources, and your defences are limited to walls and towers. The longer you survive, though, the more elaborate your colony will become. It's like a little miniature set; you'll be tweaking it and adding new fortifications - a ballista tower here, a spike trap there - till it's just the way you want it.

You can't just turtle up into a little corner and hold off the marauding hordes, much as we'd like to. If you want to get your mitts on those improved defences, you'll need to construct workshops and find new resources, so it's necessary to expand. Clearing out areas and building layers of fortifications, inch by inch, is the bread and butter of the game, a simple but satisfying process as you devise increasingly complex ways to hold off the enemy while accessing what you need.

The simple strife

It helps that the UI is nice and clear, making it very easy to demolish and build at a rapid pace. Managing troops is a relatively minor part of the game, required only when you have to hastily scramble together a team to defend a hole in a vital wall. Which is good, because the pathfinding can sometimes leave a lot to be desired as your soldier opts to take the long way round, stumbling through hundreds of enemies and dragging them back to base. That's a minor nuisance, but frustrating

> "IT'S LIKE A LITTLE MINIATURE SET; YOU'LL BE TWEAKING IT AND ADDING NEW FORTIFICATIONS TILL IT'S JUST THE WAY YOU WANT IT"



If you want improved fortifications - and yes, you do - you'll need to expand and gather more resources.





Time to have a wee panic. The horde is here. It's like we're offering free pizza or something.



nonetheless when the demise of your intricately crafted colony was caused by one tiny mistake.

Base facts

For the most part They Are Billions is fun and compelling. Easy to read, easy to understand, but, of course, hard to master. You'll be destroyed several times before you have a successful game - one tiny crack in your barricade is enough to let the hordes in to destroy everything. It's a painful learning experience each time, but the joy of building your base outweighs the potential frustration. Each attempt is the perfect opportunity to try something new.

For RTS fans there's a heap of challenge waiting to be taken on, but for those unfamiliar with the genre, it's accessible and fun in a way few modern strategy games bother to be. Anyone of any skill level could approach this and find something worth playing for.

Out in Steam Early Access now, it's already a fun way to spend several hours and as more content is added, it looks likely become a terrifically robust little gem. ■ ***Sam Greer***




GM Instant Reaction

+ Very accessible yet very deep. It's already showing plenty of content and polish for an Early Access title.

– Failure comes very quickly, especially when you first start playing, and the early game can become quite repetitive.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 **4** 5

A refreshingly different take on the classic RTS formula.

Knock 'em dead
Our top survival tips

Don't rest

It's easy to think you've made the perfect defence, but there's always room for improvement. No matter how good a setup you have, always add more. More walls, more traps. Never stop.



Do your research

The wood workshop might seem like an extravagance early on given its comparatively high cost, but it's important to push for this early as it gives you access to all sorts of vital new stuff.



Use people power

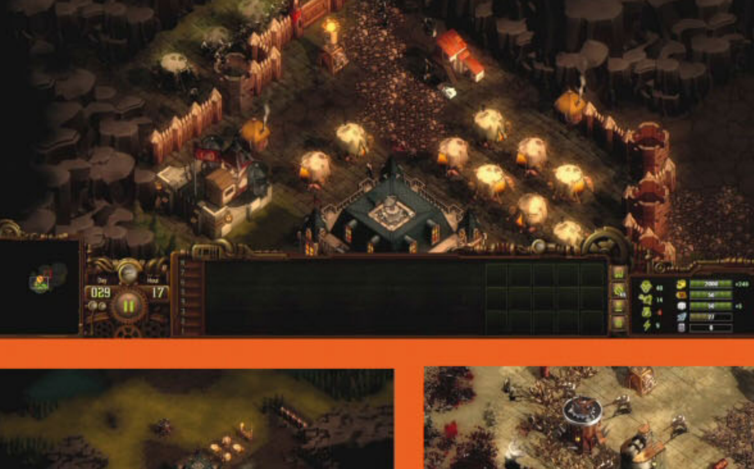
It can be tempting to devote colonists to gathering resources and stick to the bare minimum of soldiers but it's essential to have a large number of troops. You never know when a horde will come.



Leave room

In such a defence-focused game you might find yourself turtling up, but to succeed you'll need to expand. Just be careful when clearing out areas that you don't bring a horde of zombies down on yourself.







One small crack in your defences can quickly lead to your doom. Be cautious. And don't cut corners when you're constructing things.




The puzzle rooms are highly reminiscent of Portal's test chambers.


All the game's elements are easy to understand, even if the puzzles take some time to solve. What, you thought cubes couldn't be complicated?


The lighting is pretty striking at points. All those surfaces to bounce off...





Format PC **Publisher** Trapped Nerve Games
Developer Toxic Games **ETA** Summer

QUBE 2

A puzzle game to make you think outside the box



Any first-person puzzle game is likely to draw comparison's to Valve's esteemed Portal series, but QUBE 2 (Quick Understanding of Block Extrusion. Yes, really) does itself no favours on that front. It does manage to be a pretty entertaining puzzler in its own right, however.

Small, self-contained rooms, each with their own puzzle. Square rooms made out of blocks, forming perfect little test chambers. Colour-coded powers. QUBE is astonishingly like Portal, even if your central power is quite different.

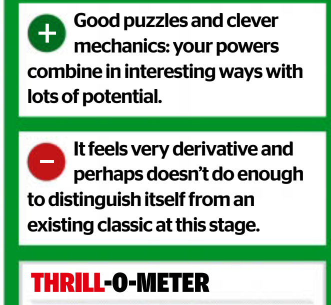
In this Steam Early Access title, you use your abilities to change the properties of various white panelled cubes in a level. You can make them bouncy, turn them into a raisable platform, or give them the ability to summon another cube. It's a small set of powers, but they do combine very well, making for some pretty clever puzzles throughout. There are plenty of "Aha!" moments, but manipulating blocks is pretty straightforward compared with the mind-bending creation of portals. Yet the strong foundation means there's plenty of room for this to grow beyond what we've seen.

Qu be, or not Qu be?

65% complete

QUBE 2 does differentiate itself from its most obvious influence with a slightly unsettling atmosphere and serious narrative, the voiced protagonist breathing life into the sterile world. You've woken up in this strange place with no clue how you got here (never heard that before!), though the central mystery is a little too vague to prove compelling.

Taken on its own, QUBE is quite fun and well put together, with some potential, but it can't live up to Portal's legend. Let's hope the developer has a few tricks up its sleeve. ■ *Sam Greer*



GM Instant Reaction

+ Good puzzles and clever mechanics: your powers combine in interesting ways with lots of potential.

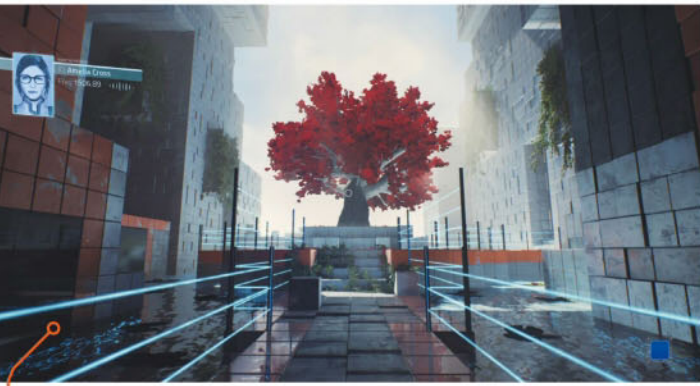
– It feels very derivative and perhaps doesn't do enough to distinguish itself from an existing classic at this stage.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

It's already fun but suffers from comparison to its clear inspiration.




The game has a narrative focus that does help separate it from Portal, though we admit what we've seen of the main mystery didn't suck us in.



We'll never tell you blowing stuff up isn't fun. We love explosions.

75% complete

Format PC **Pub** Team 17 **Dev** Petroglyph Games **ETA** July

FORGED BATTALION

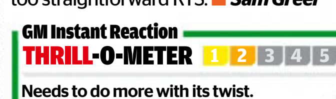
DIY destruction

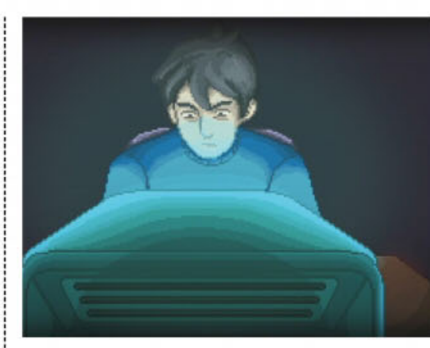
In any crowded genre it helps to enter the fray with a special ingredient, something to really help you stand out. For Forged Battalion, available now in Steam Early Access, that something is the ability to custom-make your own units as you progress through the game. Except, it's not a special ingredient at all.

The game harkens back to titles such as Command & Conquer, with an emphasis on quickly gathering resources and building your base before amassing ludicrous numbers of units to stomp your foes.

There is a pleasure in squashing an enemy stronghold with dozens upon dozens of units, especially when the sound effects are this satisfying, but it's a short-lived joy because the bulk of the game is all too straightforward. You must build structures in the order the game says – no racing to special units for interesting compromises, just a linear progression. And the key to victory is simply having the most units.

As for the customisation of your units? It adds very little when they all look very bland, and the choices you have are simply variations on what does more damage or gives more health. You might be building your own units but you're simply filling out the roster of any competent RTS. There are no mad combinations or daft inventions. You merely come up with things any bog-standard strategy game would manage. A wasted opportunity, and an all too straightforward RTS. ■ *Sam Greer*





Format XO, PC **Pub** PQube
Dev Appnormals Team **ETA** Spring

STAY

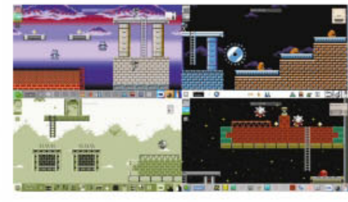
Sit, roll over

Quinn has been kidnapped and locked in a room with nothing but a computer. About that computer? On the other side of a chat window is you, and you must try and help Quinn escape. Who hasn't helped free a hostage over Skype?

It's a good setup for a story and leaves you asking plenty of questions. Who is Quinn? Who has kidnapped him, and why? Finding answers means choosing dialogue choices that will help him decide what to do. Of course, things aren't quite that simple, as certain choices will affect his mood. Have him take too many risks, for example, and he might end up a nervous wreck.

The game also runs in real time. If you quit the game and leave, time will pass for Quinn while you're away. Leave him too long and you might return to find something bad has happened. ■ *SG*

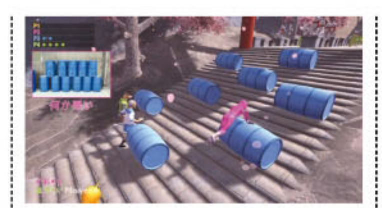




Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** PQube
Dev Super Icon Ltd **ETA** Winter

PLATAGO SUPER PLATFORM GAME MAKER

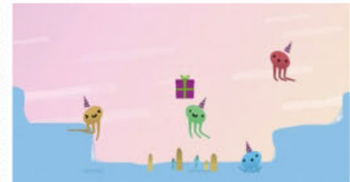
The potential of this level creation tool blows our minds a little. Very much taking its cues from the excellent-but-trapped-on-a-console-no-one-has Super Mario Maker, PlataGO sees you building your own platforming stages and sharing them with other players online. You can switch your level between eras in an instant, giving it the look of a variety of different retro consoles, and even upload your own sprites. We're salivating imagining the kind of brilliance that'll turn up on its Steam Workshop when this hits Early Access on PC this spring. ■ *RV*



Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** PQube
Dev Onion Soup Interactive **ETA** Winter

NIPPON MARATHON

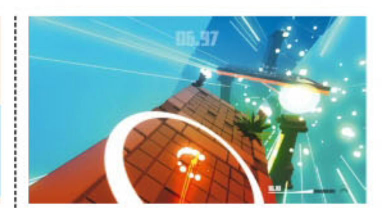
Floppy characters stumble their way through escalating obstacle courses in this frantic local multiplayer game. There's a hint of bizarre Japanese game show Takeshi's Castle to its races across building sites, rooftops, and supermarkets, though with contestants including a dog man and an elderly man in a schoolgirl outfit, it might actually out-weird its inspiration. Early Access is planned on PC for 28 February, with full release on other platforms planned towards the end of the year. It's good, clean multiplayer chaos, but we're not totally convinced by its sense of humour. ■ *RV*



Format Switch, PC **Pub** PQube
Dev Slampunks Ltd **ETA** Spring

MUDDLEDASH

On seeing this multiplayer platformer's cutesy octopus protagonists, charged with carrying a present to a birthday party, you'd assume it was the most wholesome, friendly game around. Wrong. Beneath that appealing veneer beats a heart of vicious competition. With only one gift between you, you and your buddies must scrap across twisting levels for possession. Whoever gets to the party first takes all the credit for the present, no matter how often they had to shove their mates into environmental obstacles along the way. You'll lose friends with this one, but in a good way. ■ *RV*



Format XO, PC **Pub** PQube
Dev Warpfish Games **ETA** Autumn

RAZED

Speedrunning's the name of the game in this minimalist-yet-complex 3D platformer. Stand still too long and your shoes literally explode – the perfect excuse for bounding through the elaborate stages as fast as you can. A quickly escalating variety of obstacles, each navigated in its own way (slide under this, jump over this, skirt round this) reminds us of Bit Trip Runner and its ilk, and almost give it the feel of a rhythm action game. Many will bounce off its demanding design, but those dedicated to the art of split-second platforming will find a welcome new challenge. ■ *RV*



Sails Pitch

Landlubber developers reveal what it takes to make the perfect pirate game

There's a special magic to a great pirate game. The freedom of the open sea, the swagger of the swashbucklers, the roar of a barrage of cannon fire. It's never been the most populous genre, but its handful of shining stars have certainly made their mark, and with new contenders Sea Of Thieves and Skull & Bones on the horizon, the buccaneering life feels more exciting than ever. But what is it that makes a great pirate game?

Where to start? With Pirates! The classic title came out in 1987, and within the constraints of the time's technology managed to deliver a convincing pirate roleplaying experience.

"When we made the original Pirates in 1987 there was no other game like it," says Sid Meier, legendary game designer. "It was up to us to create and define the pirate videogame. The challenge of creating a new type of game, and a personal interest in swashbuckling pirate adventures, excited me."

It offered an open world where you were free to do as you liked, whether that was attacking every ship in sight or forming alliances with the various factions. Unlike many titles that followed, this one aimed to be more of a simulative experience, offering chances for diplomacy and economy management. Your character would age over the course of the game, finding it more difficult to perform many actions until they reached retirement.



Feeling groggy

It's a bit rum...

Grog is a quintessential ingredient in the pirate formula, the beverage of choice for hardened buccaneers – but it was actually named some time after the Golden Age of piracy, supposedly by Vice Admiral Edward Vernon, who introduced the drink to his naval squadron, the name coming from the nickname he earned for wearing a coat of grogram cloth.

While The Secret of Monkey Island describes grog as containing "kerosene, propylene glycol, artificial sweeteners, sulfuric acid, rum, acetone, battery acid, red dye, Scumm, axle grease and/or pepperoni," real grog was simply a mixture of water and rum, though there are many variations of it throughout history. Modern versions of the drink contain anything from lemon to cinnamon.

"I think for players, Pirates gave them an interactive version of one of the most universal fantasies we have as a people. Who doesn't want to take control of a cool ship in an open world and find the treasure that's hiding around every corner? Their journey through the game was meaningful because it was theirs," Meier explains.

Yo ho who?

As the first pirate game it set the standard for everything that followed, but of course it had a long lineage of history and fiction to draw upon.

"In my mind, there are two kinds of pirates: the real kind that murdered innocent people and the kind Errol Flynn portrayed in movies. Only one of those is fun to play," Meier says. "Thanks to those movies and other classic stories, we all have a pretty good understanding of what that romanticised pirate life looks like. While never an enjoyable task for a designer, it made choosing what should and shouldn't be in the game easier."

Despite its simple visuals, Pirates was gaming's first taste of the high seas and one that still, in some ways, remains its most ambitious. Firaxis Games updated the game in 2004, however, complete with all-new graphics and minigames.

"While pirates are a well-trodden subject, everyone who decides to tell a pirate story puts their own spin on it. Even though they share the same name, Walt Disney's Pirates Of The Caribbean ride has a slightly different feel than the movies it inspired. Pirates is a version of the

"EVERYONE WHO TELLS A PIRATE STORY PUTS THEIR OWN SPIN ON IT"

Making history

All that glittered

Despite lasting about 80 years, from 1650 to 1730, most pieces of pirate fiction tend to focus on one very small period in the Golden Age of piracy. Namely, the handful of years towards the end, in the early 1700s, when infamous pirates such as Blackbeard, Charles Vane, and Bartholomew Roberts were active. Other famous pirates such as Henry Morgan came much earlier.

Most pirates were former sailors and took a life of piracy not just for wealth, but because of how most pirate ships were run. They would operate under an agreed-upon code, called articles, and the captain was chosen by votes. Compared with the harsh and dangerous conditions in the navy, the life of a pirate appealed to many.

adventure. This version is a maybe a little more light-hearted and whimsical than others, but that's the game we thought we should make and share with the rest of the world," Meier explains, adding: "Also, our pirates are surprisingly adept at ballroom dancing."

Decks and violence

In 2013 Ubisoft decided to try out the genre by taking its immensely popular Assassin's Creed series in an unexpected new direction. Having toyed with naval elements in its third instalment, it decided to go all-out with Black Flag. Here you were cast as a pirate, Edward Kenway, caught up in the Golden Age of piracy, meeting numerous historical figures on his journey.

Black Flag was designed to offer us the exciting swashbuckling that we see in film and read in books. You steered your ship from an over-the-shoulder perspective, keeping you immersed in every moment of the action. In Black Flag you weren't detached but always in the thick of it. When it came to ship battles, you pointed the cannons and made the manoeuvres before eventually leaping across to the enemy ship for some close-quarters combat.

It was big and exciting, but even in its quieter moments, sailing on the open seas between missions and battles, there were sea shanties to sing and wildlife to spot. Despite a pretty historically accurate setting, that romanticised pirate *feel* was spot on.

It's a testament to Black Flag's success that Ubisoft is following up with Skull & Bones, a game that sheds the Assassin's Creed name but retains that piratical spirit.

Where Black Flag and Pirates both focused on single-player pirate fantasies, Rare's upcoming Sea Of Thieves is about plundering with your mates. It's a massive open-world, online game where you co-operate, taking different roles aboard a pirate ship, seeking treasure, and battling with other players. It embraces tropes, depicting piracy in a cartoonish manner, but Rare came at it from a very different angle.

"We started with just the core creative concept of 'Players Creating Stories Together', which was where we saw an opportunity to innovate and provide a unique experience," begins Mike Chapman, design director, on the game's inception. "I think Rare has always had an affinity for pirates, with numerous little references across many of our games, and when you think about a bunch of friends embarking on an adventure, sharing a pirate ship and truly working together to sail it, it began to feel like the perfect union of idea and theme."

Why pirates though? Chapman thinks it's pretty simple. "It's really interesting to see that from a young age; lots of people grow up with a love of playing pirates. Fundamentally, I think pirates represent true freedom, challenging authority, and the chance to break the rules… which as you can imagine must be pretty appealing to a child. I think what appeals at a young age never really leaves us."

When it comes to Rare's spin on the theme, Sea Of Thieves certainly feels distinct from the rest of the genre. "Although you typically see a great deal of focus on ship vs. ship gameplay and trade aspects, you don't always see a lot of the broader elements that people love about the theme. I think we also bring a unique tone and sense of humour. Rare's games have always been known for their unique brand of humour but I think this is the first game where we give players tools to create their own humour; playing instruments together, sometimes in inappropriate scenarios, getting so drunk on grog that you throw up, dancing together as your ship sinks…"

In pursuit of that spirit of fun, the team had an unexpected influence. "Funnily enough, rather than the obvious pirate tales and movies, it was The Goonies that became a source of inspiration early on, and in many ways that '80s classic sums up our game best,"



"PIRATES REPRESENT TRUE FREEDOM, CHALLENGING AUTHORITY, AND BREAKING RULES"



Super Powers

A book to float your boat

There's a lot of pirate fiction for games to draw on, but besides Treasure Island, no book has been more influential on the pirate genre than On Stranger Tides. The 1987 novel by Tim Powers takes place during the golden age of piracy, and follows John Chandagnac as he gets involved with seaborne ruffians during a voyage to Jamaica. It features a host of historical characters such as Blackbeard and Stede Bonnet, with Powers maintaining historical accuracy but using the gaps in history to fill in his own, more fantastical ideas. This blend of reality and the supernatural made On Stranger Tides a huge success – and the novel would go on to serve as the inspiration for both The Secret Of Monkey Island and the immensely popular Pirates Of The Caribbean, both of which borrow the elements such as voodoo magic and living skeletons. The fourth Pirates Of The Caribbean film even took the title and (roughly) adapted the plot.

Chapman recalls. "It's the chance to bond together with a bunch of friends to accomplish a goal but you don't quite know the way this adventure is going to play out."

Sailor swift

For all their differences these games share very similar goals. They all want to immerse players in the fantasy of being a pirate. The very different paths they choose highlight that, while it may be easy to say what makes a quintessential pirate *story*, it's surprisingly hard to point to exactly what makes for a good pirate *game*. We've long since pigeonholed the fantasy of being a gun-toting soldier, or a space-faring hero, or an expert racing driver, but the best way of being a pirate? There seem to be several answers to that question. But we reckon Sid Meier puts it best: "Freedom is an essential quality of feeling like a pirate. We want you to feel like you're in command of the adventure and you're plotting the destination." ■ ***Sam Greer***

SpatialOS tech means your Seedlings will never be truly alone and can branch out into other people's worlds.

Who is... KLANG

Based in Berlin, Klang has been on the indie scene since 2014. With 20 years of MMO experience on board, the studio's mission statement says it focuses on creating the next generation of multiplayer games by "building virtual worlds for people in the real world". Equally important, apparently, is the team's clear dedication to consuming as much hot sauce as humanly possible.

With your Indie Master LOUISE BLAIN

Format PC **Developer** Klang **ETA** 2019 **Web** http://bit.ly/gmseedgame

#1 SEED

This one will grow on you



We've been keeping humans alive for a long time now in games. Survival games' requirements tend to be basic. Light the fire. Kill the monster. But how do we actually rebuild society? Here's where Seed comes in. This persistent MMO lets you build a world for your 'Seedlings' that's the complete opposite of that 'sitting by the fire waiting for something to eat you' feeling you get in Don't Starve.

"Roughly ten years ago, we started planning an idea for an emergent MMO that could produce complex scenarios that feel real," explains Klang's Jonathan Baker. "We wanted to create a virtual community that wouldn't feel desolate, but instead replicate the hustle and bustle of real life. When we first started, we wanted this project to incorporate everything. But to get to that stage we had to break it down to find the core playing experience for it to make sense. After two or three years of discussion, the breakthrough came when we figured out how to persistently simulate characters. That's when it started to make sense."

Seedlings are a set of lovely humans who only want to make their way in the world. They just need your help. "The main concept is for your Seedlings to lead a comfortable life through routines that fit their varied traits, emotions, and interests," Baker confirms. "As the project currently stands, initial gameplay will be the classic survival mechanic - providing them with food and shelter. But, we aim to push it further than that. Survival is not the only thing. Social elements and interaction will be a crucial part of gameplay. For example, more granular things like building the social network or progressing the career of a Seedling. These are very exciting elements that we can see down the line."

Seed only

But this is an MMO, not a tiny world you have to populate all on your own. Klang Games is using Improbable's SpatialOS server technology to make a persistent and global world of Seedlings. So, what does that mean? "SpatialOS allows us to stitch together multiple, seamless

Survival is your first priority, but the team is working with none other than Professor Lawrence Lessig for help adding political systems.

"IF COLONISTS DIE, DON'T EXPECT THE OTHERS TO SKIP HAPPILY AROUND THE CORPSE"



You can't micromanage everything in your little people's lives like you can in The Sims, but you can help "sway the bigger picture" with your changes. Let's hope you're a safer pair of hands than Leon (see p16 for his latest attempts to keep things alive).





Baker cites Dwarf Fortress, RimWorld, and The Sims as direct inspirations as well as social constructionism as a whole, and novels on humanity and technology.

servers," explains Baker. "Most traditional MMOs take place on a single server, which limits the number of players that can be online at the same time. With SpatialOS, we can expand the playing space far beyond what is traditionally expected. SpatialOS is really good at simulating and handling many entities at once. For example, if we have 100,000 players, and each player has ten Seedlings, that will quickly become millions of Seedlings persisting in the simulation."

Clearly, this is a world of many mini territories, and you'll have to play nice with other Seedling gods. "One of the key features of Seed is that players need to collaborate with one another in order to survive," Baker says. "The biggest threat isn't just the lack of resources, but the potential conflict with other Seedlings. Colonies will need to self-police or self-regulate to build safe, utopic communities that rely on trust. Bonds will need to be made with other surrounding colonies to build bigger alliances. Additionally, we aim to see Seedlings bonding in the future. If, say, we have Seedlings that work together in a factory, they might form a strong organic bond, which could lead to bigger friendships or even create families. In addition, there will be an in-game chat system and a market that can allow you to trade with other players."

Also important is your team's mental health. Food and warmth are basic needs, but true humans need more TLC. If colonists die, don't expect the others to skip happily around the corpse to claim the rest of the food. "Seedlings will be affected by the environment that surrounds them, the day-to-day situations they have to deal with, and the conversations that they will have with their fellow colonists," Baker says. "For example, a Seedling could get a reduction in the happiness or mental health trait due to a negative interaction with their peers. Another example could be that they witness something disturbing on the way to work, which would diminish their mental health. On the other hand, maybe a Seedling gets married, which increases happiness for, say, four months. But, then a family member dies, which causes a six month period of depression. Then, if not managed correctly, something worse."

Tree hee

All of this is wrapped up in a beautiful, minimalist visual style. "With the art style, we want it to be approachable and inviting, and at the same time, melancholic and dark," Baker confirms. "We chose a simple aesthetic that's graceful and thoughtful. Once colonies are populated with hundreds of Seedlings, we don't want any rendering issues; we want to make it clean and avoid clutter. With a low-poly art style, this was the best way to go to avoid potential texture issues. And, with fewer details, the imagination of the player will fill in the gaps." It's still in the early stages but we can't wait to watch Seed grow. ■

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS!

Try this!

It's hard to find a survival sim that isn't just full of monsters that want to eat you but This War Of Mine fits the bill. Just expect to get really sad. bit.ly/gmthiswarofmine

ON THE RADAR

The latest news from the indie world

All right meow

Those bemoaning the lack of news on Mew-Genics can purr-aise the sun. Super Meat Boy and The Binding Of Isaac creator Edmund McMillen is seemingly back at work on the, er, 'cat lady simulator.'"Tyler [Glaiel] and I are currently prototyping some stuff and if all goes well I'm 99% sure that little monster will once again become my obsession," he says on his blog.

Sob story

If To The Moon broke you, prepare for Finding Paradise to punch you in the feels all over again. Sneaking out on PC, the To The Moon followup from Freebird games once again revolves around two doctors who can let someone close to death experience their life all over again. Surely once is enough?

Needle to know

Frankly, analogue sticks are dull. Custom controller pro InstallReq has been touring events with an oddly satisfying-looking game called Vaccination that comes complete with 'auto injector' to heal a patient. Pick the right colour of medicine to slam into his veins and he'll do the rest.

Format PC Developer Triband ETA April Web http://bit.ly/gmkeyboardsports

#2 KEYBOARD SPORTS: SAVING QWERTY

Not a waste of Space



When was the last time you looked at your keyboard? No, *really* looked at it. Yes, there's where you spilled that can of Coke Zero and cleaned it up really badly. And there, yep, right there are flakes of Greggs' sausage roll. Peer even closer, if you dare, and you'll find that your smudgy attention is clustered around the WASD keys. They're the MVPs after all – or MVKs. But what if everyone was equal in a democratic keyboard world? What if you got to use every button?

"We forgot everything about the keyboard and looked at it for the very first time," explains Keyboard Sports producer Rune Drewsen. "If you don't know about keyboards, it looks like a custom controller from the '80s – like the Nintendo Power Glove or a Dance Pad, just even weirder. It must have been designed for a really weird game. We decided to make that game." Like a typing game but far more fun, Keyboard Sports lets you use every button to aid the little orange Tip – "he's named after the end of your finger. But don't tell anyone, it's kind of secret" – in his adventures. Whether you're making your space bar a sofa or crossing lava, every button on your keyboard represents an area on screen where Tip can safely stand.

Board now

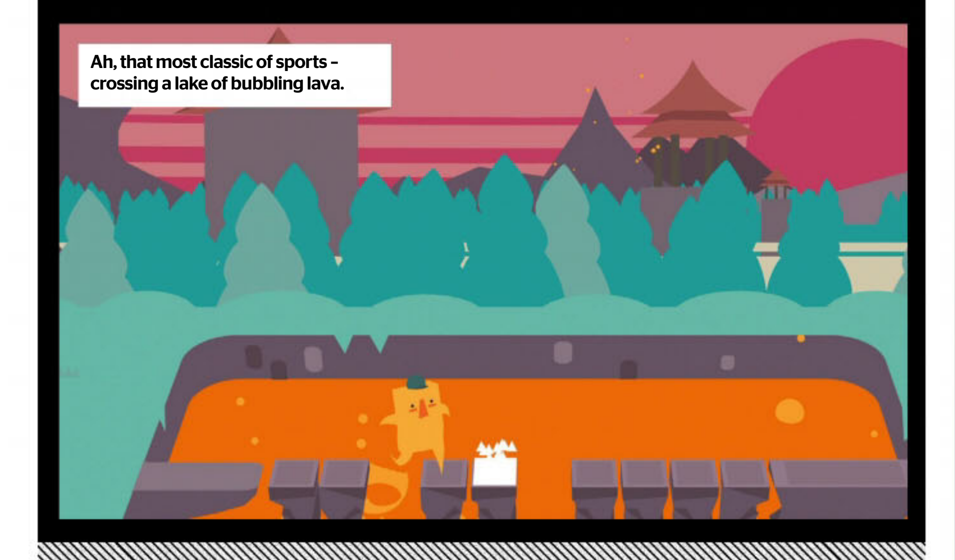
It turns out that the Sports bit of the title is a bit of a misnomer. "Keyboard Sports started out as a sports game for the keyboard," says Drewsen. "We quickly realised that we didn't care much about sports and the project grew into this challenge of coming up with new kinds of



The game started out as a basic prototype released via Humble Monthly before, err, *shifting* into something more substantial.

gameplay – all based on the keyboard as a controller and not a boring typing device. With Keyboard Sports we want people to feel like a child sitting in front of the keyboard for the very first time. All the keys and the feeling that they each do something different, something magical that you don't understand yet. Players are often very confused because of all their old typing habits, but the moment they surrender, their keyboard will never be the same again."

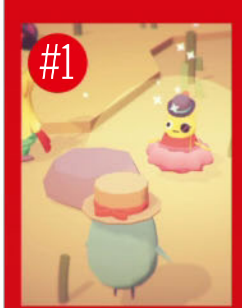
Every press of every key matters. Tip must save planes from crashing, navigate mined seas in a boat, and even go snowboarding. Plus, just like GM, the Triband team are big fans of puns. "The game is filled with keyboard puns," Drewsen confirms. "Good jokes have always been *key* for us, and we find it very difficult to CTRL ourselves. Even the songs on the soundtrack contain puns and they will definitely hit rock *button*… We probably have to release the game when we run out of puns." Easy guys, you're *enter*-ing the realm of GM now. You'll have to *shift* into a different level of punning. Seriously, though, we're finding it difficult to *function* without Keyboard Sports right now. ■



Ah, that most classic of sports – crossing a lake of bubbling lava.

Small… But Perfectly Formed

The best indies to play on Xbox One in 2018



#1 OOBLETS

Yep, this adorable farming sim is a console exclusive to Xbox, so your Derbles and Fleebles will be the envy of your PS4-owning friends. Whether you fancy journeying out into the world or just hiding at home with your Ooblets, this charming adventure lets you do what you want with your new pals.



#2 ORI AND THE WILL OF THE WISPS

And you thought your thumbs could finally go back to normal after Cuphead. Moon Studios' follow up to Ori And The Blind Forest looks just as beautiful as the original. Don't let that fool you though. Expect Ori to demand perfect precision platforming once again.



#3 ASHEN

This bleak survival game puts the focus on your interactions with other players. Building trust with strangers is difficult, especially with communication limited to a selection of gestures, but if you do make a friend, you can take an NPC copy of them back with you to your town.



#4 THE DARWIN PROJECT

Fancy PUBG in the snow? This battle royale takes place on a freezing mountain. You're one of the stars of an entertainment show in which only one survivor can win. With traps to set and ways to influence the game even once you're out, this is an… ice addition to the genre.



#5 DEEP ROCK GALACTIC

It's about – and we quote – "badass space dwarves". What more can you want? This one- to four-player co-op FPS has us intrigued with its blend of procedural generation and class-based gunplay. Beards, bullets, and black holes? Let's grab an ale and head to space. ■



Format Switch, PC **Developer** Cosmoscope
ETA Summer **Web** http://bit.ly/gmmorphieslaw

#3 MORPHIES LAW

It's time to kick some mass

It's time for a science lesson. Let's talk about mass. If you dig deep into the pit of your brain, you might remember that F = MA. Peer further and you might remember Newton's second law of motion dictates that force is equal to the mass of an object multiplied by its acceleration. Morphies Law, on the other hand, dictates that mass is the difference between winning and losing. Welcome to a shooter with a difference. Oh, and you can forget Newton again.

On its way to Switch and PC, Morphies Law turns the traditional shooter on its head. Kill someone in one of its mainly multiplayer modes and you'll find that you grow in size – and there's even a scientific reason for this. Every successful pull of the trigger of your magical gun transfers mass from the victim's damaged limb to your corresponding limb. Kill/death ratio doesn't matter here. To reign victorious you're going to have to get as big as possible, but that has the small, not to mention unpleasant side-effect of enabling everyone to see you. Stay on a losing streak and you'll stay out of sight and able to find new areas of the map to hide in, but start winning and you're not going to be able to conceal yourself.

Physics lesson

Here's where being a Morphie comes in, though. It's not all of you that grows, but individual body parts. You and your team mates are each made up of eight body parts, all with their own strength and abilities. Grow your feet for improved jumping, or make sure your lower body is in peak shape to improve your, er, 'butt rocket.' Mass suddenly means everything as your personalise your Morphie for peak performance.

Intriguingly too, you can share mass between your team of four to create the ultimate set-up. Friendly fire between team mates is positively encouraged as you shrink some players and add mass-related perks to others. Just don't think about what Newton would say, eh?. ■



The bigger they are, the harder they fall? Not so sure about that, but they're certainly much easier to shoot when they're huge.



Format PC **Developer** Klei Entertainment **ETA** Spring **Web** http://bit.ly/gmhotlava

#4 HOT LAVA

Burn after reading



Were you ever truly a child if you never played 'the floor is lava' while bouncing around the house on a rainy day? What do you mean you've never heard of it? Perhaps you've just landed on Earth and randomly picked up a copy of GamesMaster – welcome; don't judge the rest of humanity on these puns – so a quick overview is needed. Imagine that the floor is lava. Lava is ow. Aaand you're done.

New from Don't Starve devs Klei Entertainment, Hot Lava does exactly what you'd expect and covers the floor of a slew of environments in flaming magma for you to avoid. From your childhood bedroom, to underground caverns and fire-flooded school gyms, lava has found its way everywhere and you'll need to free-run to keep your precious tootsies safe from melting. Whether that's darting between the bed and bookcases at home, or making more use of the gym equipment than you ever did in PE class, as long as you're off the floor, it's all good.

Sizzle real

First-person parkour is always a challenge so it'll be interesting to see just how light-footed and accurate we have to be while traversing the various worlds. There's even a choice of dashing hero to play as.

Klei has also promised a multiplayer element so it'll be just like that time you and your sibling made it all the way down the hall on the couch cushions but ended up tripping over the dog. Just us? Okay. Just us. ■

"KEEP YOUR PRECIOUS TOOTSIES SAFE FROM MELTING"



Maybe a bout of Freeze Tag afterwards could counter the effects of a long sweltering Hot Lava session in the gym? If only our PE teacher could see us on *these* bars.



Desert wastelands are out; lush, green post-apocalypses are in.



THE SCENIC ROUTE

Guerrilla Games reveals how it crafted Horizon Zero Dawn's astonishing open world

The dark night surprises

By night the landscape of Horizon Zero Dawn changes completely, shifting your attention towards the fiery glows of distant settlements, the probing blue eyes of machine packs, and beams of moonlight peeking over the silhouetted mountains. Guerrilla aimed to give a long-exposure look to the game at night, while using a tool called the Ambience Manager to scale things such as fire, electricity and lights. Crucially, the intensity of indirect lighting from the moon is increased, while fire intensity is decreased from its daytime setting, giving it all an ethereal, dreamy look.

2017 was a seismic year for videogame landscapes. From Breath Of The Wild's dreamy reimagining of Hyrule, to the painstakingly detailed deserts, dried riverbeds, and rich riparian oases of Assassin's Creed Origins, it feels like the industry's scaled a mountain to reach a peak of open world technical prowess. Guerrilla Games' Horizon Zero Dawn is part of this, sweeping us away to a primordial future where monolithic machinery weaves through vibrant nature, and new, low-tech cities tower paradoxically over the ruins of our modern civilization. We speak with staff at Guerrilla Games about how they brought this picturesque world to life.

Coming to Horizon from the linear Killzone series, the devs first had to make Guerilla's proprietary Decima Engine play nice in an open world setting. "During the creation of Killzone Shadow Fall we already started on large-world support, but all of our scripting, 3D world editing, level design, and other tools were below par to make Horizon," technical director Michiel van der Leeuw tells us. "So we pretty much started from scratch, replacing tools one by one almost all the way to the end. Our toolset is now a lot more scalable, and our team more productive than in the old linear shooter days".

Peak of perfection

For the game's art director, Arjan Bak, the key difference between designing scenery for a linear game and an open-world one is that the former is akin to designing a stage or movie set, where the developers have more control over the player's gaze. "For Horizon, this was no longer possible," he tells us. "We needed to build a world that would work from all possible angles." Mountains were crucial to this setup, controlling players' sightlines – obscuring, revealing, and framing the scenery as appropriate – but also contributing to the sense of natural majesty in the world. And anyone who's played Horizon will know that there are no mountains in gaming quite like its vivid realisation of the Rockies.

The team responsible for designing mountains researched satellite images, real-world photo locations, and documentaries. But the designers went further still, Bak tells us. "We used tools that allowed us to recreate how mountains were formed. Once we were happy with the scale, shapes, and style, our teams further hand-dressed them to make sure they were both majestic and believable from long distances, as well as detailed and rugged up close."

Horizon's setting across the US states of Colorado, Arizona, and Utah is a super-condensed version of the real thing, but Guerrilla used the kind of old-fashioned visual trickery that would've made the designers of Disneyland proud. Rivers, for instance, get thinner the further up a mountain you go, while trees encircling the base of a mountain are scaled down to make it appear more massive. Bak continues: "We paid extra attention to the way we layered the world, because there always needs to be something visible in the distance, whether it's hills, mountain peaks, or a ruined city."

Until recently, open-world games have tended to commit to a single biome with minor variations (think Far Cry, Bethesda RPGs, GTA V, and Red Dead Redemption). Alternatively, to accommodate more geographic variety and sense of a wider world, games

"WE PAID EXTRA ATTENTION TO THE WAY WE LAYERED THE WORLD... THERE ALWAYS NEEDS TO BE SOMETHING VISIBLE IN THE DISTANCE"

Aloy poses for a selfie overlooking the landscape – Photo Mode makes Horizon an open-world game for the Instagram generation.



Snow fooling around

DLC is usually an opportunity for developers to condense their experience of making the main game into a polished showcase of the game at its very best. Frozen Wilds is a viciously frigid region, bolstered by the improved look of the snow and ice that Guerrilla crafted for the DLC. "The main game already had snowy areas, but never thick layers of snow draped over rock formations or half-frozen waterfalls, or even cracked ice lakes," art director Arjan Bak tells us. "These were all-new features that required us to try many things before we hit the looks we were after." The resulting snow in Frozen Wilds looks incredible, reacting dynamically to footsteps, collapsing machines, and fire. Makes us wish they'd added a new 'Snow Angel' pose to the Photo Mode...

> "HORIZON IS NOT ABOUT REAL NATURE, WHICH CAN BE HARSH, DARK, AND GRITTY. WE WANTED TO CREATE THE BEST VERSION OF NATURE"

like Dragon Age: Inquisition and The Witcher 3 featured vast zones that you travelled between using a world map. But Guerrilla was more ambitious, condensing hundreds of thousands of square miles of diverse American landscape into a map no more than 16 square miles in size (similar to Skyrim), ranging from the deserts of Monument Valley to the ruins of Denver, by way of Hallett Peak in the Rocky Mountain National Park.

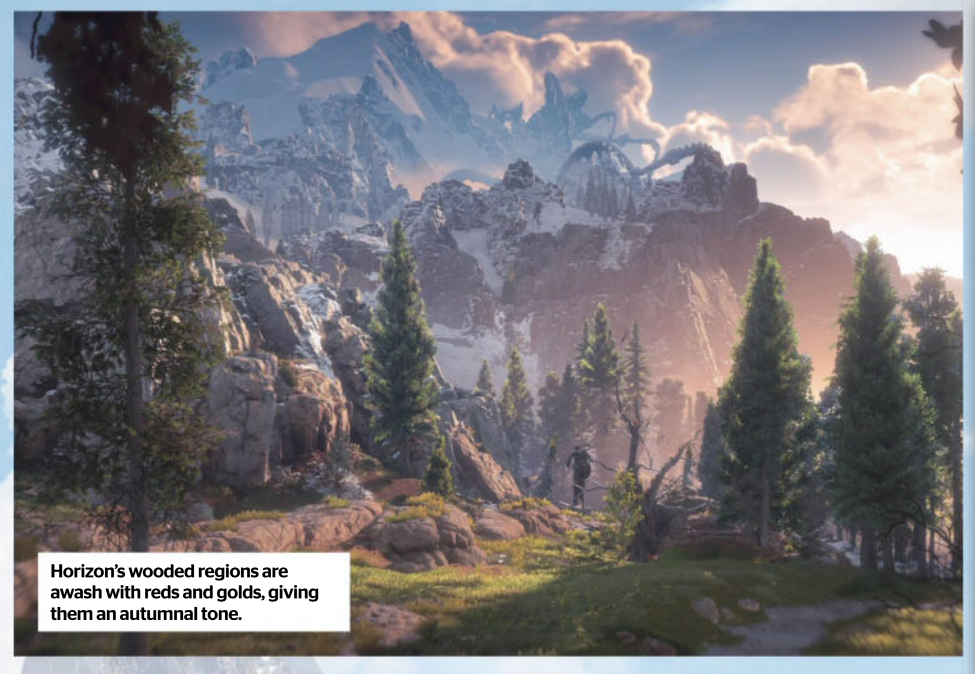
So how do you keep the transitions between these disparate regions smooth? How do you step down from a mountain straight into a desert, then brush the sand off your boots in a neighbouring woodland without being glaringly aware of it? "We used mountains and rock formations to break up lines of sight in potentially jarring biome transitions", Bak says. "We also used rivers and lakes to create natural transitions from one biome to another, and top-down images to help us create smooth blends in the terrain."

Play of the land

Horizon feels more like a highly saturated, mystical vision of a real-world setting than a realistic one; points of interest and areas of beauty are upscaled and foregrounded, while less awe-inspiring features are removed altogether. "Horizon is not about real nature, which can be very harsh, dark, and gritty. We wanted to create the best version of nature – vibrant, lush, and majestic," Bak tells us, pointing out how the glaciers in the game were originally more realistic, right down to the murky sludge at their melting bases, but were then adjusted to highlight their beauty. "We wanted the perfect image of a glacier instead, with the deep luminescent blues of the ice and sparkles in the packed snow as the sunlight hits it."



But all this beautiful scenery would've counted for little if players didn't go out and engage with it, so Guerrilla had to pique our interest through more than just map markers. This involved techniques as simple as placing forks in roads and reducing Aloy's movement speed to give the player time to absorb their surroundings. It also, quite literally, entailed moving mountains, game director Mathijs de Jonge tells us, "By


Horizon's wooded regions are awash with reds and golds, giving them an autumnal tone.




The snowy region in The Frozen Wilds looks genuinely freezing. It all feels incredibly real.

simply playing through the game ourselves (loosely following the paths), we could see if important landmarks and points of attraction were visible, and not blocked by buildings, trees, or mountains," he says. "In the early stages we'd move entire mountains and elevate or lower large parts of the terrain. Later in development, we'd move trees, ruins, and other objects in order to clear important lines of sight".

With its rugged terrain that often forces you to follow circuitous (and scenic) routes to reach your destination, Horizon Zero Dawn's world feels natural and hostile, but it's all meticulously crafted; a virtual theme park of nature, its hundreds of paths and promontories designed to draw your gaze out upon its landscape. Guerrilla's achievement was perhaps diluted by the fact it had to share the spotlight with the latest, also incredible-looking outings in the Legend Of Zelda and Assassin's Creed series, but the fact that the team created an equally impressive open world at the first time of asking should be an inspiration to other developers. Although, in this generation at least, developers will have their work cut out in surpassing the spectacle of 2017's open worlds... and we're looking forward to seeing what they create. ■ ***Robert Zak***

Place station

Horizon miraculously packs around 300,000 square miles of US landscape into its map. Here's a selection of some real-life famous locations you can find by exploring in-game.











Photo credit (top to bottom): Max Pixel, Terry Foote, Bernard Gagnon, Ben Bigham, Jean-Christophe Benoist


PS4 Pro
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HOW WE SCORE

0-39 Awful Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
40-59 Poor Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
60-69 Decent A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
70-79 Good Some flaws, but still a very enjoyable experience.
80-89 Excellent Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
90-100 Outstanding A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system, in the same genre, and for the same format at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it...



Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.

Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** Capcom
Developer Capcom **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

MONSTER HUNTER: WORLD

Capcom's magnificent monster mash makes its play for the west



For some of us on Team GM, this is a series we've never managed to get into. The concept has always appealed, and the world filled with dinosaurs always seemed rad as hell, but the games themselves always felt held back by a combination of tech and design. Fans have declared them unsung gems for a long time, but it's been all too easy to be put off by the limitations of handheld hardware and the sheer inpenetrability of the game's systems. But with Monster Hunter: World, all those concerns are a thing of the past.

This latest entry is Capcom's bid to not only deliver on the huge ambitions of the series but to open it up to a new audience. And hot damn, it's managed it.

In case you've never heard of the series: Monster Hunter has you playing as – you guessed it – a hunter of monsters. The game's broken up into phases. First, you'll be making preparations and gathering supplies. Then comes the hunt, as you look for clues and track down your monster. Finally you face off with the monster and, once it's defeated, use its hide or bones to craft better gear, to let you go after an even bigger, nastier beastie.

The story, slight though it is, is about a world in which humans are under constant threat from the giant deadly beasts that share their world. To combat this they have whole legions of hunters, and it's those boots that you're destined to fill. This time you are off to what the game calls the New World (though it's pretty much just like the Old World), a partly undiscovered continent filled with monsters. You've come here chasing an Elder Dragon (a volcanic Godzilla, basically). They migrate here every decade or so, and you need to discover why.

There isn't much story really – a few cutscenes now and then – and it's when story takes centre stage that the game is at its weakest, particularly in a couple of dull boss battles. That's a minor part of the hundreds of hours you'll spend playing but it's a waste all the same. It's refreshing, at least, to play through a plot that doesn't revolve around saving the world for once. Just don't go into Monster Hunter: World expecting to be caught up in some grand narrative. You won't be.

GM GOLD AWARD

> **"A PARTLY UNDISCOVERED CONTINENT FILLED WITH MONSTERS NEW AND OLD"**

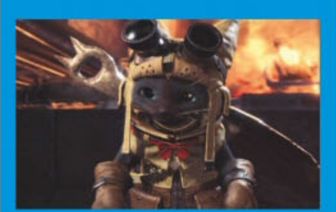
Monster munch

What you will get is an awesome world to lose yourself in. With Monster Hunter: World, Capcom has truly spared no expense – this is the real deal. The New World is breathtaking to see in motion, with huge, lush environments crawling with wildlife both small and gigantic. It's a space that feels absolutely electric with life, where you worry about each step in case you



CATWALK

The best looks for your helpful little Palico



Puss in goggles

This might be the default look for your Palico, but there's no denying it's a strong one. This outfit is adorable and practical in equal measure. Perfect for a trek through the jungle.



Conan the furbarian

A simple outfit, but one that's a perfect match for the hunter who wants to revel in the trophies of their hunts. This skull-and-bones-garbed Palico is a certified badass kitty.



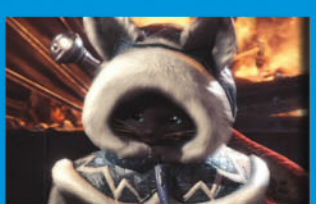
Paws of steel

This knightly attire will be sure to protect your handsome Palico from all sorts of danger, and is a shiny, eye-catching get-up to boot. Look at those armoured ears!



Purrasic lark

Perfect for the lizard lovers out there, this costume lets your furry pal dress up as a little dinosaur. You'll have to best an extremely angry, fire-breathing tyrannosaurus to get the parts, though.

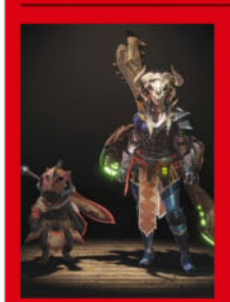


The cat's pyjamas

Truly the peak of adorable outfits, this cosy, fur-lined jacket and hood will transform your clever kitty into the cuddliest creature on the face of the earth – and it'll keep them warm too!

BEAST MODE

Four survival tips to keep you alive



1 Always be prepared! Make sure you stock up on healing potions and antidotes, but also spend some time gathering rare herbs to make super versions of those potions, or even new potions entirely. You'll find they're essential to success the further you progress.

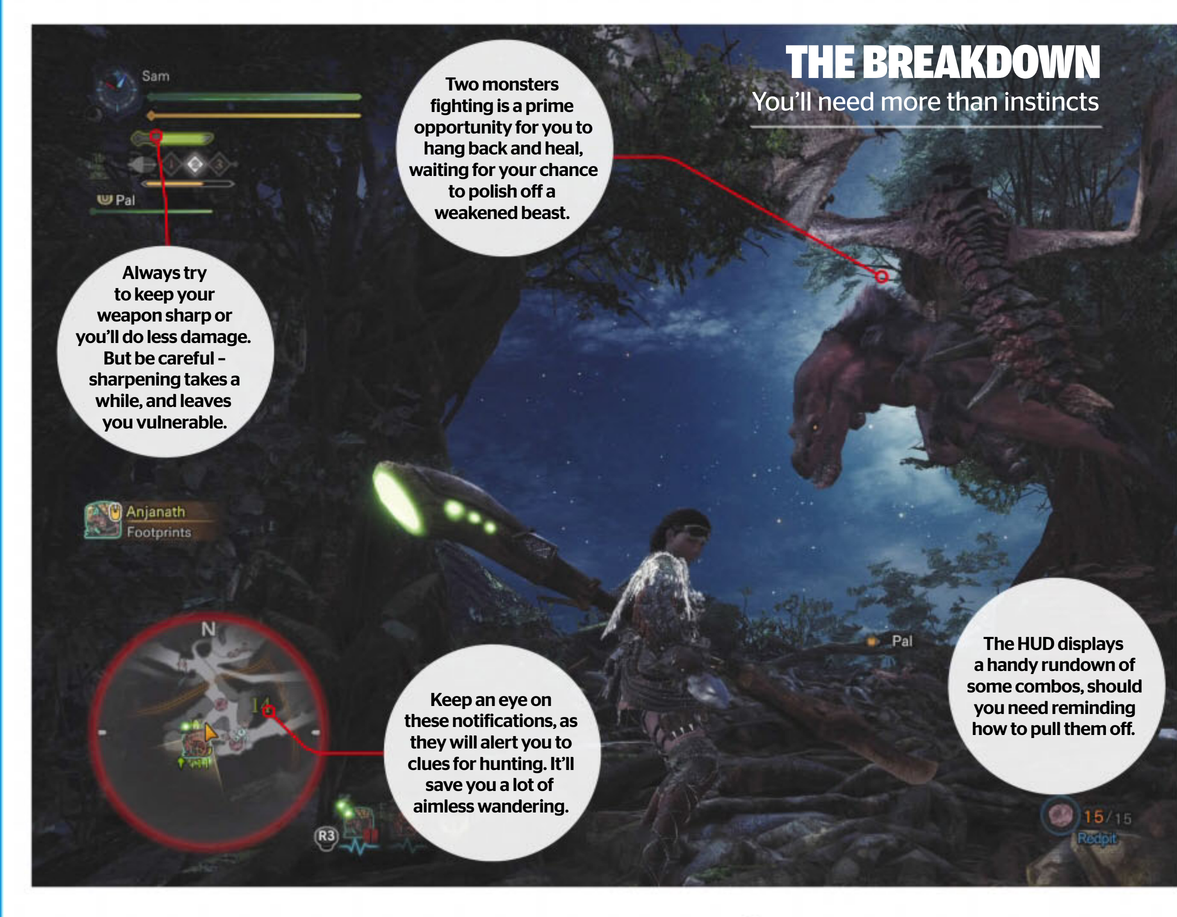
2 Change armour! It's tempting to stick to one outfit, especially if it's stylish, but as each one has different strengths and weaknesses you'll want to change it now and then to give you an edge when fighting a particular monster. Don't fight an electric beast in a metal suit!

3 Don't be afraid to run away! As tempting as it can be to keep hounding a monster there comes a point, where you may need to retreat and get new supplies. It can be a pain but it's better than getting knocked out and losing far more progress.

4 Bring your friends! The monsters in World are super-tough but they're a lot easier to approach when you're with a group of friends. Just make sure you all co-ordinate your weapons and abilities so you complement each other for the most effective hunt.

THE BREAKDOWN

You'll need more than instincts



Two monsters fighting is a prime opportunity for you to hang back and heal, waiting for your chance to polish off a weakened beast.

Always try to keep your weapon sharp or you'll do less damage. But be careful – sharpening takes a while, and leaves you vulnerable.

Keep an eye on these notifications, as they will alert you to clues for hunting. It'll save you a lot of aimless wandering.

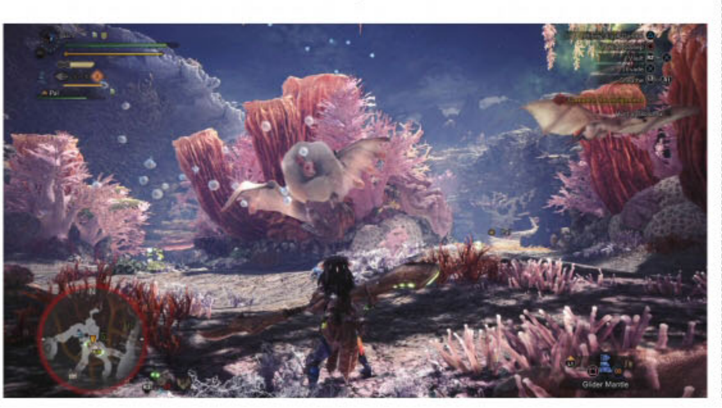
The HUD displays a handy rundown of some combos, should you need reminding how to pull them off.

trample on some tiny critter. All too easily you find yourself standing around just taking it all in.

The game's ecosystem isn't just for show, even if you will be gawking at it often. Every creature, from the bugs to the dinosaurs, fits on a food chain, and they'll be interacting with each other as often as they'll be trying to chase after you. The feeling that you're simply entering into something bigger than yourself is what really makes Monster Hunter: World feel so special. Plenty of games try to have lively wildlife and environments but nothing has ever been quite as convincing as this.

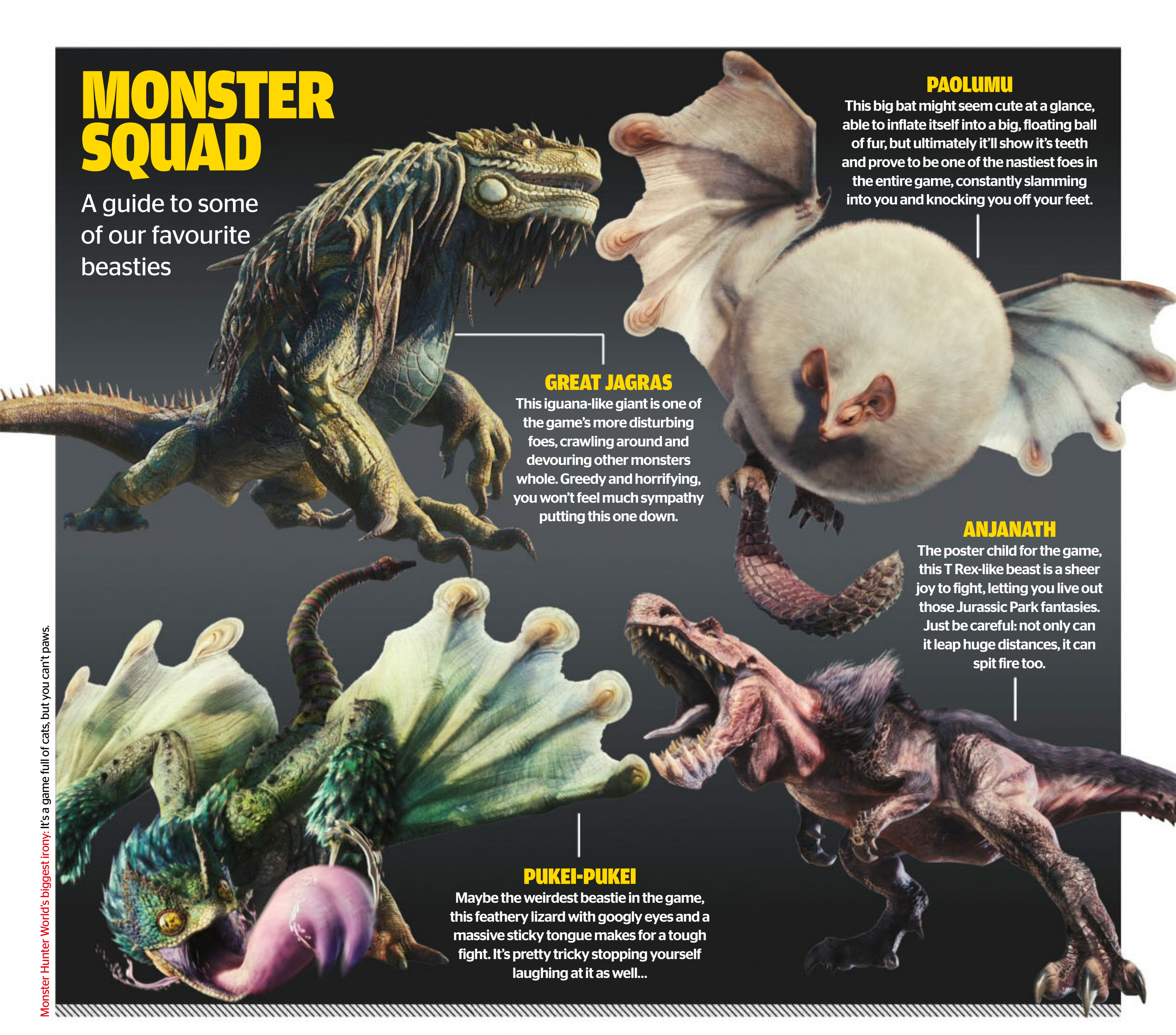
Creature comforts

You'll start off in a wild, dense jungle but soon enough you'll be wandering



through rocky deserts, swamps, and even stranger locations, all of which have their own monsters and intricate food chains, requiring new tactics. It's not just the world itself that's varied; its inhabitants are differ wildly too. It's full of dinosaurs, which is just fantastic anyway, but there are also dragons, giant inflatable bats, and this big feathery thing with a fat poisonous frog tongue. (Look, it gets *weird*.) The variety maintains a level of excitement because there's always the possibility of new surprises. Nothing in the game is quite as exhilarating as your first encounter with a brand-new beastie.

Of course this is called Monster Hunter, not Monster Safari, and sooner or later you'll have to get stuck right in. It should be said up front that Monster Hunter is a stupendously deep and complex game. When you're first faced with all the options of weapons, potions, traps, and tools, it can seem incredibly daunting. How will you ever learn to use



Monster Hunter World's biggest irony: It's a game full of cats, but you can't paws.

all this? Take a breath. This is a game that, if you commit to it, you'll be playing for dozens if not hundreds of hours. All those mechanics and techniques? All those monster behaviours? You don't need to know every single one right away, so don't panic. These are things you'll be learning one bit at a time at your own pace over the entire game, and if there's a special joy to Monster Hunter: World it's realising that even dozens of hours in, you still have so much to learn. That's properly exciting.

The game does kick off with a helpful, if a little rote, tutorial that covers the basics and should help ease in new players. It's also possible to set up an online session to find help from more experienced players, who can join you on hunts to show you the ropes. With a game as deep as this, getting exposure to another player's methods and tactics is a great way to learn.

Before each quest or hunt you'll find yourself in the game's hub, called Astera, a nice little hangout for hunters where you can grab supplies, meet up with friends, and forge new equipment. Astera is an incredible location to look at and the presentation of all its various parts never fails to put a smile on our faces. Seeing the team of blacksmiths yell in enthusiasm as they craft each piece of new gear, or the elaborate cooking sequence as the feline chef prepares a meal, makes every little step of preparation a whole event in itself. When you're finally ready you'll head off out into the wilds to hunt one gargantuan beast or another. At this point, you must look for clues, footprints, or other traces of the monster. Then your handy little Scoutflies, glowing bright green, will guide you towards your target for the inevitable showdown.

> **"EACH ENCOUNTER FEELS LIKE A BATTLE FOR THE AGES, EVERY ONE A STORY WORTH TELLING"**

Fighting monsters involves wielding absurdly large weapons, most of which have a slow and deliberate feel. There's real heft in each swing of your blade, but you have to be very careful with each strike. As most monsters are easily capable of thrashing and leaping about, you need to consider the timing of your attacks very carefully, or you'll end up throwing yourself into harm's way. Combat is, naturally, the most intense part of the game, and it's completely engrossing as you struggle to take down a monster while it tears up a forest and throws its weight around. Each encounter feels like a battle for the ages, every one a story worth telling. Of course, each great battle results in greater rewards, and once you've slain your foe you'll gather resources from it and use those to build new weapons and armour. That's the loop that makes the game so compelling: hunt, upgrade, hunt, upgrade and so on.

Greater expectations

Of course, while the loop of the game is pretty simple what's involved in each part is incredibly complex. There are traps to research and build, ingredients to gather for special potions, and loads of combinations of gear. The arsenal of weapons alone offers a wildly varied experience, each one coming with its own set of moves and having radically different abilities and tactics. You'll probably find a favourite and invest in it but it's also easy to experiment, trying out a new weapon when an old one proves less than effective against a particular monster. Some of the options

Different environments demand different approaches and different loadouts of gear.

are brilliantly weird as well; you've got bagpipes and Gunlances, plus the fantastic Insect Glaive which allows you to leap about as if doing the pole vault while launching a little friendly bug to harass foes. And that buddy beetle? It's possible to upgrade it or get new kinds of insects with different abilities. Many weapons have little sub-systems like that, making using and upgrading each one feel like a minigame unto itself, instead of it being just another minor variant of dino-smasher.

Being able to beat up a monster isn't quite enough, though. Monsters are more than capable of fleeing or retreating when in danger and some are simply too tough to take head on. So you'll come to rely on a variety of traps, bombs, and projectiles. Even the environment itself can be an aid. There are loads of useful plants and bugs that can be used, like the Paratoad, which you can kick over to make it discharge a cloud of paralysing gas. (But make sure you don't get caught in it too!) Being in a desperate struggle, your health dwindling, then discovering a bug that can heal you is the sort of welcome surprise and turn of events that makes the game such a constant thrill.

A hunt can end up being a bit of a slog as the monster flees, leaving you to trek across the map after it, slowly chipping down its health when you get the chance. It's important to remember when you decide to take on a beast that this is a fight that could last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. Those lengthy hunts are often a lot of fun, but they are something you'll need to set aside time for, particularly as you can't pause.

Clever tactics can drastically cut down your hunt times, however. The most fun way to tackle a beast we've found is to lure it into the den of another monster, letting the two giants duke it out while we watch from the side, like a giddy kid, witness to our very own King Kong vs Godzilla movie.

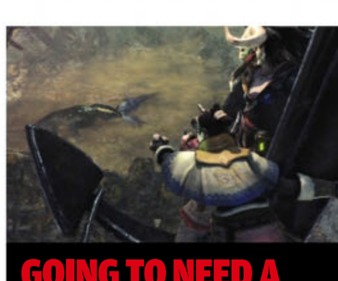
And yes, you might end up feeling sorry for the monsters at a certain point. Beating them up enough that they limp off, desperately trying to reach their lairs, can make you feel pretty rotten. It's the whole premise of the game, obviously but the presentation does, deliberately or not, inject a real feeling of guilt at times which is a little at odds with the tone.

Pedigree chum

To share in your guilt is your trusty and unbelievably adorable Palico, a humanoid cat that will help gather supplies and assist in combat. You can customise the weapons and tools it carries, determining the role it'll play in supporting you. Palicoes are ultimately a small part of the experience, but they inject a lot of character into a game that might otherwise be awfully serious. Just brace yourself for lots of cat puns. They. Never. End.

No help will compare with the assistance of your fellow humans however. Monster Hunter: World, like all previous games, offers robust co-op for up to four players. The thrill of the hunt is already substantial, but co-ordinating

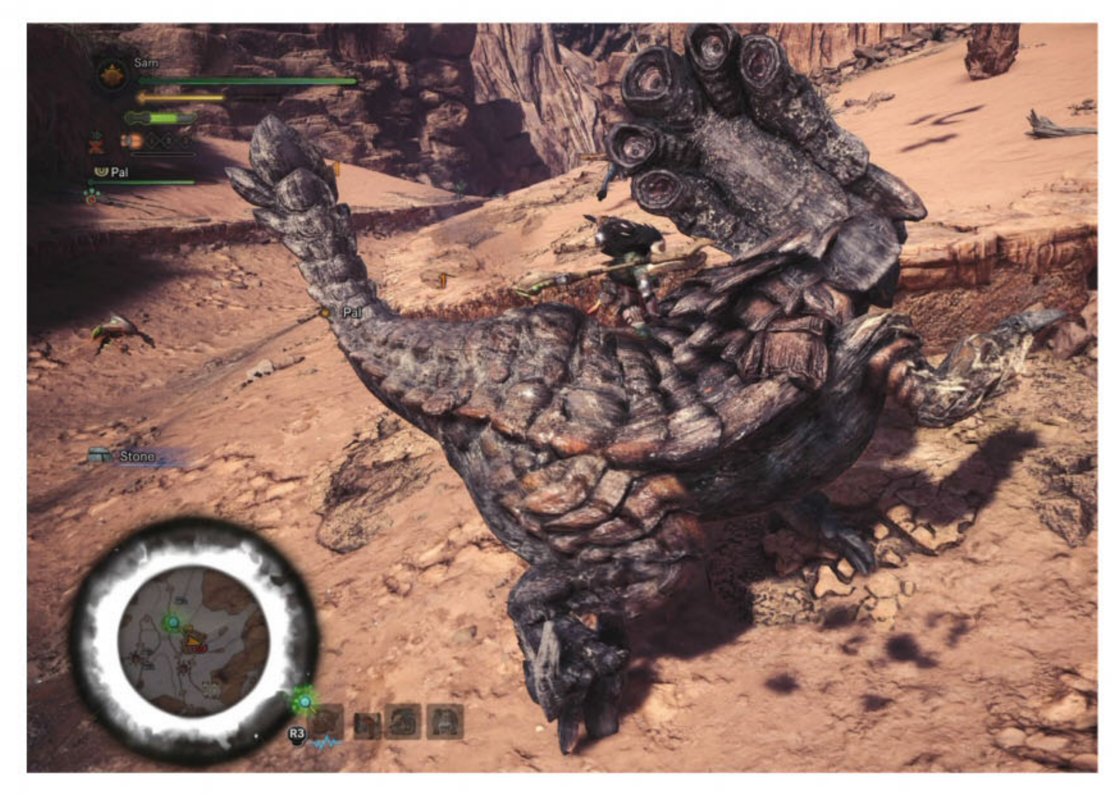
"HUNTING WITH FRIENDS TURNS THE GAME INTO SOMETHING AKIN TO A TACTICAL SQUAD GAME"



GOING TO NEED A BIGGER SWORD

You won't do everything the first time round

While the main story will pull you from one area to the next, there are plenty of reasons to return to old areas. First, to complete various armour and weapons, you'll need to gather specific hides and bones from monsters. The parts of the monster you damage determine the pieces you get in return, and you won't be able to gather everything in a single hunt. Each area also contains extra-tough monsters you won't be able to tackle until later in the game. If you want special gear, you'll have to improve to take them on.





Hide in jungle foliage and monsters will lose track of you, allowing you to chug a sneaky healing potion.



The game's locations range from believable wildernesses to surreal and fantastical realms.

one with a group of friends is so much fun. It also introduces loads of options for how to tackle monsters, without trivialising the challenge. The game does a great job of making room for different playstyles, and sorting out a hunting party with friends transforms the game completely, turning it from an action-RPG to something almost akin to a tactical squad game. Everything great about it is improved by the presence of other players, especially if you're willing to communicate. You'll constantly have those moments of "Did you see that!" or "Check this out!", which is exactly what you want from a multiplayer experience.

The system for arranging these co-op sessions can be pretty fiddly and unintuitive, unfortunately. It's particularly awkward when it comes to main story quests, where other players are only allowed to join after you've been through that mission's cutscenes and dialogue – and they can't just watch them with you. We suspect it's to encourage you to play those levels solo, but it ends up being a painful halfway house.

Wonderful World

Despite the detailed world and thrilling multiplayer, it's perhaps the pace of the game that most keeps it compelling. It fluctuates expertly between quiet, pleasant moments of meandering exploration or resource gathering, and then intense, all-engrossing, giant battles. That juxtaposition means the game never loses its magic, even hundreds of hours in. You're never stuck just doing one thing, and even once you become familiar with one aspect, there are a dozen other things you still haven't touched or tried. New monsters, new weapons, new abilities, and more. The scope of the game is almost preposterous, but the incredible thing is just how expertly Capcom delivers on so much of it. No monster feels anything but unique, no environment phoned in or dull. For a series that's had to squish itself onto handheld devices for so long, being let loose on modern hardware is clearly a watershed moment.

Better yet, it's polished and more accessible than the series has ever been. It's the latter aspect that feels the most important here. While being able to finally bring to life the Monster Hunter game of fans' and onlookers' dreams is an incredible feat. Capcom is finding ways to help ease brand-new players into it, and that makes it a great experience. All the depth in the world is pointless if a player doesn't know where to start, and Monster Hunter World does a good job of pointing newcomers in the right direction. The user interface certainly feels like it could be simplified – the menus are dense with options and information to a near maddening degree – but thanks to the intuitive design displayed elsewhere, those are an obstacle you'll be happy to overcome.

Monster Hunter: World is a spectacular game, a behemoth of high production values, polish, clever design, and imagination. It's a game aimed at long-time fans and those who have never touched the series alike. So much care has been taken in almost every single aspect that it's simply a marvel to experience moment to moment. What Capcom has done here is truly special, and a great lesson in how to bring mainstream appeal to a series without sacrificing what makes it special. We've laughed, we've screamed, we've gasped.

If the likes of Destiny, The Division, and other not-quite-MMOs have left you cold, or flown by too fast, we'd encourage you to dip your toes in these less familliar waters. World isn't just a game – it's an obsession waiting to happen. ■

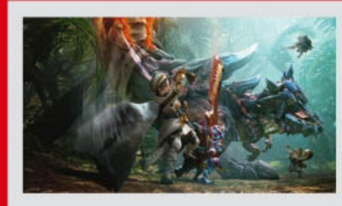
GM LOVES...

- The spectacular and varied world feels truly alive.
- Combat's satisfying and boasts incredible depth.
- Co-op is great fun and makes the game even better.

GM HATES...

- The menus are overly dense and confusing for newcomers.

Better than...



Monster Hunter Generations
Generations has a lot going for it, but it's pummelled into dust by the behemoth of Monster Hunter: World.

Worse than...



Dark Souls
The style of combat is surprisingly similar, and there's giant monsters aplenty in both, but the mind-blowing intricacy of Dark Souls' world wins out.

DLC



Monster Hunter World will have several pieces of free DLC, the first of which will add in a creature from earlier games called the Deviljho. It looks... spiky.

GM JUDGEMENT



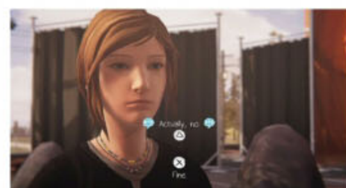
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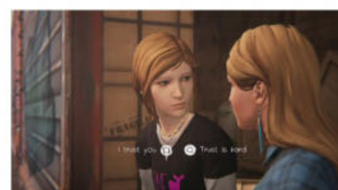


A massive, sprawling beast with engaging depth to match. You'll be playing for months to come.
Sam Greer

Before The Storm bounces between humour, drama, and tragedy. Against all odds, it works.







Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** Square Enix **Developer** Deck Nine **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

LIFE IS STRANGE: BEFORE THE STORM

We long to hear the story of her life

Okay, here's the deal: This is a prequel to a game that currently has a sequel in development. The prequel isn't by the same developer as the original, but the sequel *is*. Only one of the two main characters is in this series, and she's played by a different person (apart from the upcoming epilogue to the prequel to the original, in which the original actress returns, oh, and so does the other main character). Simple, right? However, just so we're clear, new developer Deck Nine has achieved the seemingly impossible, and lived up to the original series.

It's often the somewhat paradoxical case that a prequel can't be fully understood by those unfamiliar with the original. Before The Storm, however, can be easily enjoyed and understood by anybody yet to experience the original Life Is Strange. True, the full impact of this three-episode miniseries is most keenly felt by those already aware of the tragedy everything is leading up to; but the writing is strong enough to cater for everybody.

With Max and her time travel powers absent, Chloe is at the centre of this walk-and-click adventure. Dialogue choices, sometimes with meaningful consequences, remain. In place of the time rewind mechanic we have 'backtalk'. In these moments, Chloe can use a blend of smarm, sass, and wit to 'win' a conversation and convince somebody to let her have her way. It's essentially a simple, fun, word-association minigame.

Price to pay

Dontnod may not have a direct hand in this, but the world of Arcadia Bay is as convincing as ever. For fans, it's like coming home. Familiar areas revisited, new corners explored, and established characters glimpsed in the periphery shortly before that first fateful time travel experience. Though not physically present, Max's ghost whispers throughout. Chloe's pain and associated sense of abandonment from her best friend's physical and emotional distance can be felt in text messages, diary entries, and throwaway dialogue, and even in the way she latches on to Rachel Amber.

There are several narrative threads to pull, but this is ultimately about building Rachel's character (she was only ever discussed in the original) and exploring how she meets and develops a relationship with Chloe. It's excellently done. Rachel proves to be a fascinating, surprisingly deep character (so far as the limited run time allows), with Deck Nine's Chloe essentially being the same as Dontnod's, though offering dialogue options that clash with what you would expect from her is a double-edged sword of player agency and canon betrayal.

The first episode is the best, dramatic and well-paced. The two that follow are a little bloated, though the performance of The Tempest in the second is fantastic in ways we refuse to spoil. Incidentally, each episode's title is a quote from the play, and it's no accident that Rachel and Chloe's time together is tempestuous.

Even when Before The Storm begins to drag (Chloe's visions of her father, for example, aren't as poignant as they're meant to be), you can be sure that there's a sequence round the corner that will have you on the edge of your seat. Most importantly, everybody here feels *real*. Welcome back, Chloe. ■

"THERE ARE SEVERAL NARRATIVE THREADS, BUT THIS IS ULTIMATELY ABOUT REVEALING RACHEL"

Which character in The Tempest inspired the name of a washing powder? Ariel, who cleans clothes superbly. Really!

GM LOVES...

- Arcadia Bay returns as it was – vibrant and fascinating.
- The best moments are on a par with the original.

GM HATES...

- Bad pacing on occasion, with poor use of limited time.
- The character models are disappointing.

Better than...



Oxenfree
This difficult-to-pigeonhole adventure is great, with smart dialogue and engaging characters, but it's a little clunkier than Before The Storm.

Worse than...



Life Is Strange
The unforgettable original is an incredibly hard act to follow. Deck Nine did a great job, but Dontnod's tighter, more emotional series wins out.

NEED TO KNOW



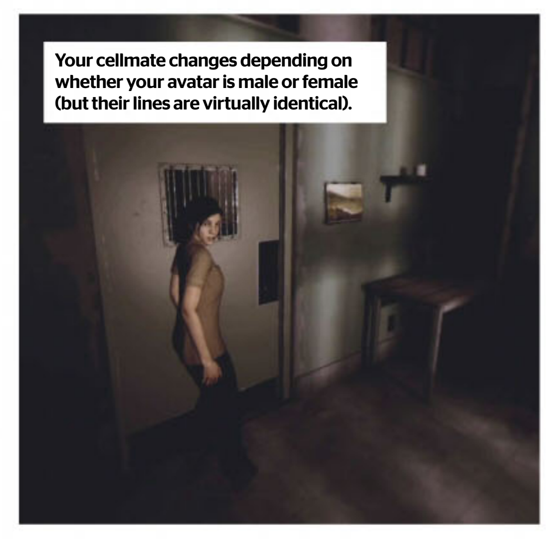
The bonus episode, 'Farewell' is, cheekily, only available to those who buy the 'Deluxe' series pass. With Ashly Burch once again playing Chloe, and Max appearing, it's tempting...

GM JUDGEMENT

81%

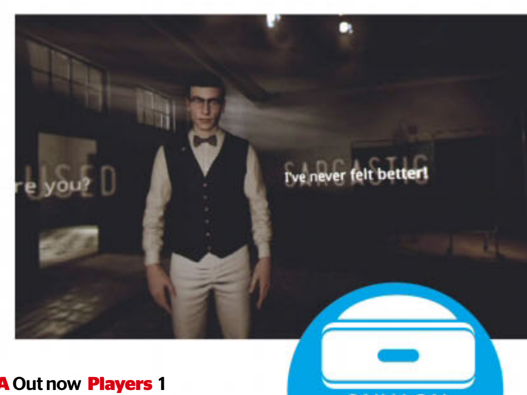


Fans won't be disappointed. It's a prologue clearly made by people with love for the original.
Luke Kemp



Your cellmate changes depending on whether your avatar is male or female (but their lines are virtually identical).





Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Supermassive Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

ONLY ON PSVR

THE INPATIENT

Did you wait for our review, or are you too inpatient?

If there's one genre perfectly suited to VR, surely it's horror? 3D sound and an uninterrupted 360-degree view of the game world is crammed full of poop-inducing potential. Plus a mischievous mate could sneak into the room to scream into your ear when you least expect it.

A sort of prequel to Until Dawn, The Inpatient takes place 60 years before the teen screams. You play as the final patient to be admitted to Blackwood Sanatorium during what proves to be its last day of business. It's all about having a front-row seat for the story of how and why it shut.

Before we delve into the main experience any further, we should point out something that the game does not: the awkward, incremental turning can be adjusted in the options menu. We recommend full analogue turning if you can stomach it, as it makes for a much smoother journey than the jarring left and right mini-teleports. Sadly, there doesn't seem to be a way of increasing your walking speed, which consistently sits at 'arthritic sloth'.

Suffering from a big dollop of that old chestnut amnesia, you have the dual goals of getting out and remembering who the heck you are. The good news is, an opportunity to escape your cell eventually presents itself; the bad news is, this is because something goes very, very wrong.

Rush of bloodstains

There's no combat, and no chase sequences. There *are* a few jump scares, but it's mostly psychological horror – and it's largely successful. Sound is implemented excellently, in that you'll often hear almost nothing as you creep along the dark, damaged, and sometimes bloody corridors. One memorable (and missable) sequence sees a menacing animal panting and growling behind you... always behind you...

Oddly, perhaps, you won't spend too much time alone. This is partly so you have people to follow for pathfinding, but also partly because it's a dialogue-heavy tale; and, as the game tells you no fewer than *three times* at the beginning, your choices will affect the story. You always have two choices when replying to an NPC, though most of them are of no consequence. The much-touted voice recognition (usually) works well, but we didn't find it made things more immersive, and we stuck with button pushes.

Speaking of immersion, the creepy atmosphere is brilliant... but sporadically broken by accidentally turning 180 degrees due to the non-customisable controls (or, if you don't have a huge playing space, difficulty in simple actions such as opening doors). The truth is, The Inpatient would work better as a non-VR game, as this would remove the side-effects of the fear of motion sickness and an obligation to make use of the camera. The graphics would look a lot sharper too, though it looks great as it is.

The whole thing is over in just a few hours, and your influence on events is not as significant as you might hope. Our second playthrough, making different decisions at every opportunity, saw few major differences before the last 20 minutes or so. A third playthrough is devoid of tension, and the lack of a chapter select baffles us. It's good... but not as good as it could have been. ■

"YOU HAVE THE DUAL GOAL OF GETTING OUT AND REMEMBERING WHO THE HECK YOU ARE"

Who fights crime, and also helps you get to sleep? The Dark Knight Nurse

GM LOVES...

- It has fantastic atmosphere, and it can be genuinely scary.
- Despite loss of tension, the first few replays remain engaging.

GM HATES...

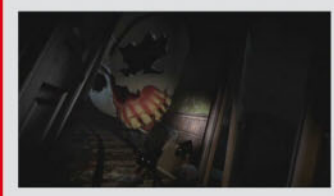
- The story's all middle, with no clear beginning or end.
- Controls do the job, but they're a little too cumbersome.

Better than...



Batman: Arkham VR
Sprinkled with a little horror of its own, virtual Batman is very impressive and undeniably well-written, but almost insultingly brief.

Worse than...



Until Dawn: Rush Of Blood
It may 'just' be an on-rails shooter, but it's more consistently scary and, most importantly of all, simply more fun.

NEED TO KNOW



Things you can interact with shine helpfully. Examining objects triggers lost memories, which in turn fills in gaps in the story piece by piece. Don't expect to find them all first time round.

GM JUDGEMENT





Although peppered with flaws, this is an interesting experiment that rises far above tech demo.
Luke Kemp

The new, still atmospheric lighting perfectly captures the tone of the original.

SNAPSHOTS OF THE COLOSSUS

Say cheese!

The remake features a robust photo mode – check out a few of our favourite pics from our time with the game.



Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony **Developer** Bluepoint Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

Standing on the shoulders of giants





Originally released in 2006 to critical acclaim, Shadow Of The Colossus is as highly regarded now as it was on release. This remake from Sony and Bluepoint Games aims to update what is arguably one of the greatest games of all time. No small task. A colossal one, you might say.

Shadow Of The Colossus tells the story, set in an ancient world, of Wander. He's travelled to the Forbidden Lands, a secluded kingdom devoid of any human presence, untouched by the outside world, where the remnants of a forgotten civilisation scatter the landscape. He's come here because of an old legend, which claims that here the dead can be resurrected. His aim is to bring a young woman back to life, for reasons unknown. Upon arriving in the Forbidden Lands, at a towering ancient shrine, a disembodied voice speaks to him and tells him it can indeed raise the dead, but only if he can slay 16 Colossi that roam the land.

From there you set off as Wander to tackle these giants, with only your trusty horse Agro for company. Each Colossus is a huge, unique creature that is, in essence, an outsized organic puzzle. You'll need to observe it to learn how to climb it, gripping its fur to scale it, to get where you can hit its weak points.

The story takes dark turns and asks you to question the nature of your quest, even as you're compelled to act by each new bit of spectacle. Its ending is an all-time great, though we won't spoil it – it's best left as a surprise as it perfectly reshapes your understanding of the whole story.

Whether this makeover of an esteemed classic works depends on two things: does it capture the game fans know and love, and does it present the game well for a brand-new audience that's never played it?

"THIS VISUAL REMAKE AIMS TO UPDATE ONE OF THE GREATEST GAMES OF ALL TIME. NO SMALL TASK"

Old and new

The former question is the easiest to answer. The graphical overhaul is extensive, giving a truly stunning level of detail that makes this a contender for the title of best-looking game around. What's more important, though, is how well it

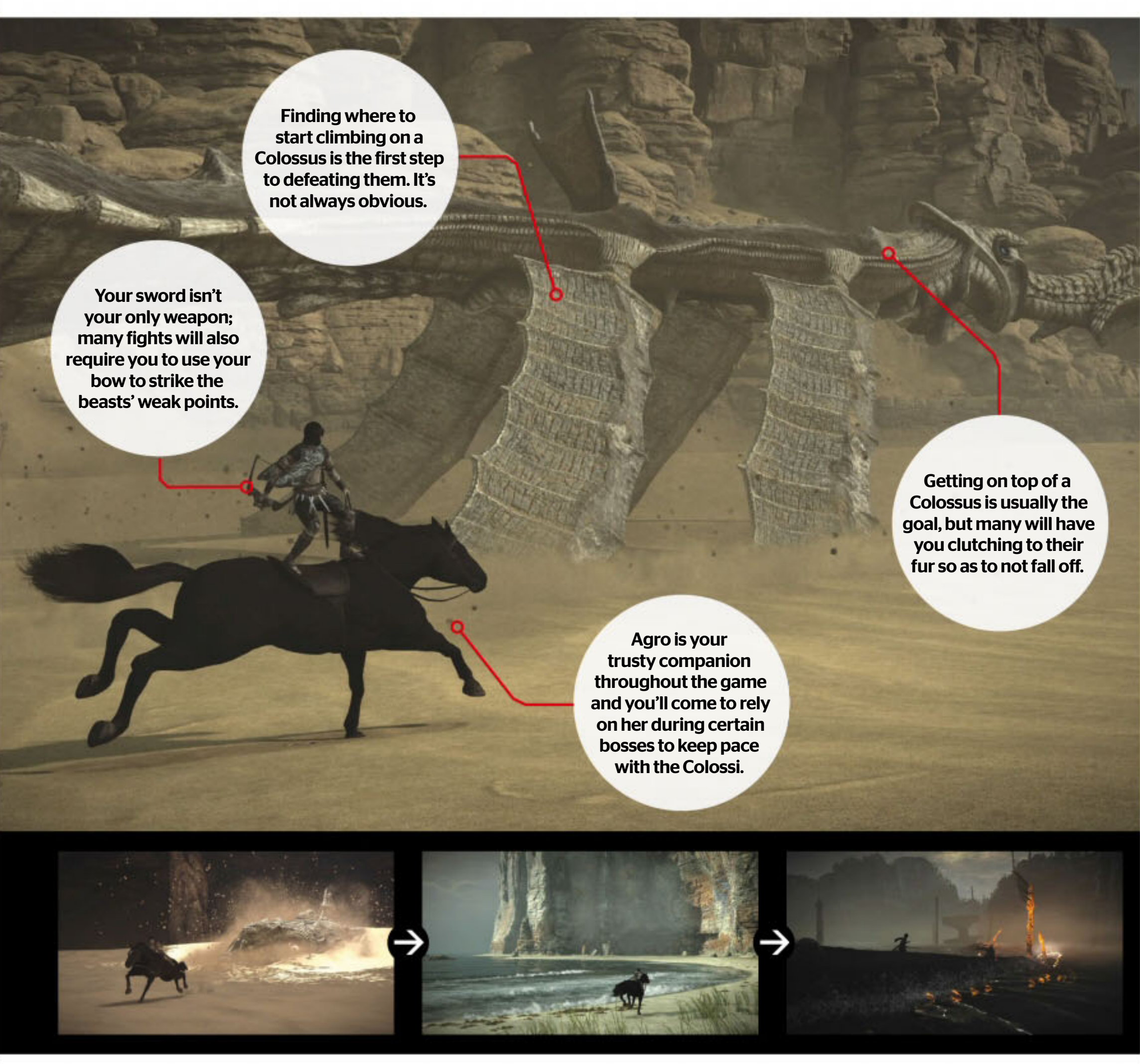


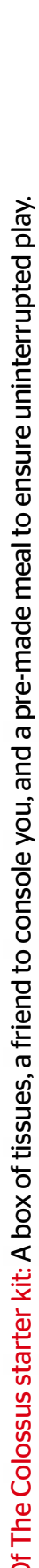
SHADOW OF THE CONTROLLER

How does the new control scheme feel?

Visuals aside, almost nothing else has been altered. This still feels as moving and captivating as it did in 2006. There's a tweaked control scheme to help new players, though you can still choose the original controls.

Regardless of which control scheme you choose the game handles just as it ever did. Animations are smoother but they're fundamentally the same, meaning the sensation as you play is unchanged. There's still that scrappy feel as you clutch onto a colossus' fur, Wander struggling to hang on. Your limited stamina makes these moments perfectly tense. Yes, you'll feel frustration, but without it, the satisfaction when you succeed just wouldn't be the same.




Shadow Of The Colossus starter kit: A box of tissues, a friend to console you, and a pre-made meal to ensure uninterrupted play.

retains the art direction of the original. We can only assume a great deal of research was done to match the higher level of fidelity with a realistic look that defined the world of the original. The rocks and trees, the vegetation and water – everything looks as you expect it to in nature. Striving for realism isn't always worthwhile, but it's this attention to detail that makes the more fantastical elements of Shadow Of The Colossus so believable. There are few games that blend the fantastic and the real so perfectly. The resulting marriage makes for a game that draws you in completely.

But the atmosphere is the same as the original's. The lighting may have been overhauled but the stark contrast between light and dark remains. All-new vegetation and other natural features may fill the Forbidden Land but it feels as isolated and sparse as ever, a place eerily empty. For all the new detail, the essence has remained untouched, and the makeover simply achieves the effect of making Shadow Of The Colossus feel brand-new, even for those intimately familiar with it.

So what then for new players? Does this compare with modern games? Nope. Because Shadow Of The Colossus is still completely unlike anything out there and, honestly, hasn't aged a day. It's still every bit as spectacular and meditative as it was upon release in 2006. The 16 Colossi remain incredible feats of animation and game design.

Those impressive fights are the only activity in the Forbidden Lands. When one is defeated you'll be returned to the shrine at the map's centre, moving the story along before you must venture out again to find the next foe. It risks repetition, but thanks to the landscape the journey to each Colossus feels as important as the fight. You want to spend time in that world, clutching at the details.

The Forbidden Lands is a special place. Huge swathes of it have no Colossi but are crafted with incredible intricacy. You'll find a secluded forest shaped by a bubbling stream or a desert alcove where a lone tree persists. They serve no purpose in terms of reward but they absolutely fire the imagination, making you wonder about the history of this mysterious place. It's a place to lose yourself in, that'll make you feel isolated and reflective. There's no other place in videogames like it.

Hidden world

Loneliness really is the defining emotion of your time in this world. There are no other people and only the smallest of wildlife. You're not entirely alone, however. Agro, Wander's horse, will carry you over most of the world's terrain and will even aid in some battles. Unlike horses in other games, she isn't simply a car with legs. She has a mind of her own, and learning to co-operate with her is one of the game's persistent challenges. It can be frustrating when you try to spur Agro on and she refuses to gallop but the effect is you feel like you have a real, living companion. Agro is a precursor to The Last Guardian's Trico and she is every bit as convincing as a sentient entity, separate from you.

If anything, in the light of recent bloated open worlds and rote action/platformers, Shadow Of The Colossus is an even more appealing game than it was at its original release. This isn't just an escape from the real world, this as an escape from other games. If you've never played it before then you'll find this every bit as special as those who played it a decade ago.

That's what impresses most about Shadow Of The Colossus. A decade on, absolutely none of its magic has been diminished. It still feels brand-new and powerful, its tale still moves you deeply. This makeover is incredible but it's a new lick of paint on something that was already a masterpiece. No game out there reaches so high and actually manages to achieve those lofty ambitions. Now is the perfect time for a revisit or the chance to try it for the first time. From start to finish, Shadow Of The Colossus is as close to a perfect experience as there is in games. ■

GM LOVES...

- The same incredible atmosphere has been retained.
- The makeover is outstanding, setting a new visual benchmark.
- Is as unique now as it was at release, utterly compelling.
- Colossi are incredible to see in motion, even a decade later.

BEYOND THE FORBIDDEN LANDS

The works of Team Ico



Ico

The team's first title, which established a unique art style and penchant for minimalist storytelling. It's aged well, but we reckon it deserves its own lavish makeover.



The Last Guardian

Team Ico's long-in-development title imagined a massive beast that was a friend instead of a foe. Deeply moving, and again a game very much unlike anything else out there.

NEED TO KNOW



For this remaster developer Bluepoint didn't reuse any assets from the original game. Every single model was built completely from scratch to make the most of the new hardware and graphics available. And it shows.

GM JUDGEMENT





A fresh coat of paint spruces up an already timeless classic that still feels like a breath of fresh air today.

Sam Greer

GM Review

The Final Verdict!

Throwing screen-filling supers is the order of the day, especially when the meter is very easy to boost.









Format PS4 (reviewed), XO, PC **Publisher** Bandai Namco **Developer** Arc System Works **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-6

DRAGON BALL FIGHTERZ

Goku Goku Fighting Club

As the most popular manga and anime in the world, Dragon Ball has had many games released over its 30-odd year existence, though with questionable results. What it's really needed is the right technology and right developer to come along to unlock its Super Saiyan potential.

This 3v3 fighting game is the one we've been waiting for, from one of the best fighting game developers in the business. Arc System Works achieved a groundbreaking technical alchemy for its own Guilty Gear series a few years ago. Replacing hand-drawn sprites with 3D cel-shaded models running at a responsive 60fps, yet manipulated to look like a classic lo-fi anime with a fraction of the frames, it made an already great fighting game look stunning on modern hardware. Suffice to say, the same method was perfect to use for an anime-based series with huge mass appeal. When you see Goku and the gang zipping in and out of the action, unleashing over-the-top super attacks, as the camera unhooks for dramatic close-ups to remind you that this is all being rendered in real-time, the results are just breathtaking.

Massive effect

This isn't just Arc reskinning Guilty Gear though. Fighting games have been veering more towards accessibility anyway, but it's doubly important for DBZ fans who want to play a fighting game that makes them feel like a Super Saiyan without the harsh reality of getting bodied by all comers online. To that end, FighterZ doesn't just have a meaty package of things to do outside of online play, it also has a significantly simpler control system compared to Arc System Works' other fighters.

A quarter-circle rotation is about the most complex input demanded of you, with many moves and combos executed at the tap of a button, from throwing projectiles, to homing attacks and rush grapples that can quickly close distance on an opponent. Launching several screen-filling supers over a match is the norm rather than a rarity, especially when you can hold down buttons to charge the gauges you need to spend on them up to a maximum of seven bars. The ability to auto-combo by just mashing the light or medium attack buttons might seem a step too far, but when everyone's at an even level for dishing out super spectacles, there's more room for mind games instead of fussing over inputs.

There are also just as many manual combos or counters against spammed attacks more proficient players can put to use. Need to break someone's guard?

Teleport behind them, then let loose a fly kick. Getting beaten back by auto-combos? Deflect it with a well-timed parry. Lest you forget, your teammates can also be called in for assist moves or safely swap in mid-super.

Although each fighter has the same inputs, they have distinctive movesets. For instance, instead of projectiles, Captain Ginyu sends out his henchmen to attack, while Trunks is the only one armed with a blade. It certainly helps to make up for the fact that – at least for non-DBZ fans who don't know their Goku from their Gohan – some of the roster look a bit samey. After all, how much spiky hair can you possibly bear? That's not to say there isn't visual variety among the 24-strong line-up from across the series, which includes the introduction of a literally power-hungry villain created especially for the original story mode.

Frieza crowd

With three character arcs, the campaign is a lengthy affair that isn't just long stretches of dialogue interspersed with a few fights or padded bouts against generic grunts. Okay, you're technically fighting clones most of the time, but don't be fooled by the grey colour schemes, as they still have all the movesets of the real deal, as well as the odd modifier that increases attack power or even regenerates health. You're also free to move around a world map to pick your fights, so if you want to make a beeline for the fight that progresses the story, you can, though extra fights will help level your fighters up and even grant stat increases for the campaign.

It's not hugely challenging, at least until much later, but makes for a fun campaign that encourages you to experiment with different fighters. You find yourself rotating party members to try to level them all up in an almost RPG-like fashion. However, the real incentive to mix and match your team comes from the fan service of dialogue that plays out between certain characters before a fight. Games such as Marvel Vs Capcom: Infinite and Fire Emblem Warriors have also been about unusual crossovers, with results coming off like awkwardly delivered fanfic. However, it works a treat in FighterZ, with plenty of funny moments referencing former adventures and battles. Besides, when you've got doppelgängers, timelines criss-crossing, and characters coming back from the dead, another dose of weirdness hardly feels out of place.

As accessible as the online game is, if you're hankering for a challenge that isn't a human opponent, you can head to the Arcade mode, which offers a series of fights that split into different paths, determined by how well you rank at the end of each match. It's a simple set up but will definitely test the mettle of those who want to aim for the highest performing path. The rewards you get at the end make the effort worthwhile – the Super Saiyan Blue versions of Goku and Vegeta can only be earned this way.

Grouping everything together, the lobby rather encapsulates FighterZ's colourful charm. With really quite cute chibi avatars running around an island, it's a festive environment where you can match up for online or local fights and access all the other modes by interacting with the cheery attendants. Where menus would have sufficed in any other fighting game, that most of the rewards you can unlock are used purely for better expressing yourself in the lobby shows there's been thought put into shaping a welcoming, good-natured online community. Only time will tell if Dragon Ball FighterZ will be a utopia where casual and hardcore players join in violent harmony. But when there's a generous amount of content to choose from, it probably doesn't really matter if a noob's only interaction with a pro is with a friendly emote (or 'Z-stamp') instead of a fireball. Everyone's a winner. ■

"THE LENGTHY CAMPAIGN ENCOURAGES YOU TO EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT FIGHTERS"

How tall can Alan spike up his own hair? About two inches. Not even close to Saiyan levels.

WHAM DRAM

Five of the anime's classic moments re-enacted

Depending on the characters picked (or not picked) on both teams, the stage selected, or who lands the finishing blow, matches can begin or finish with special 'dramatic scenes' taken from the anime's most famous moments. Don't worry, we won't spoil exactly how to trigger them.

1 Frieza kills Krillin by blowing him out of the sky, the trigger for Goku's first Super Saiyan transformation.



2 The head of Android 16 offers his dying words to a young Gohan before he's crushed under Cell's foot.



3 Trunks slices and dices Frieza into pieces before blasting him into smithereens. Talk about karma.

4 Goku's fight in space with Beerus has him reverting to his regular form while plummeting back to Earth.





5 You can reenact Yamcha's demise at the hand of a Saibaman, ending with the pose that's spawned many memes.



KAME CHAMELEON

Story mode breaks the fourth wall

Although you start the story as Goku, you're actually playing yourself, a soul who has come to be linked with him.

The bizarre conceit just about works, as other characters address you directly while you also possess them to help fight in the campaign. It also makes a rather handy excuse for why everyone can only fight one at a time.

GM LOVES...

- The most beautifully animated fighting game ever made.
- The original story mode is substantial, with plenty for fans.
- Simplified inputs are great for newcomers but still have depth.

GM HATES...

- Non-DBZ fans may find these spiky-haired fighters a bit samey.

Better than...



Marvel Vs Capcom: Infinite

FighterZ faithfully realises its source material with such care that it puts MVC's lack of personality to shame.

Worse than...



Street Fighter V: Arcade Edition

Even with its launch mishaps, SFV remains the absolute king of fighters. Its updated package makes it essential.

ONLINE



Lobbies host up to 64 players for casual and ranked matches. Fight within your lobby with Arena Match, or use World Match to connect across networks. Online, you can have six-player matches.

GM JUDGEMENT



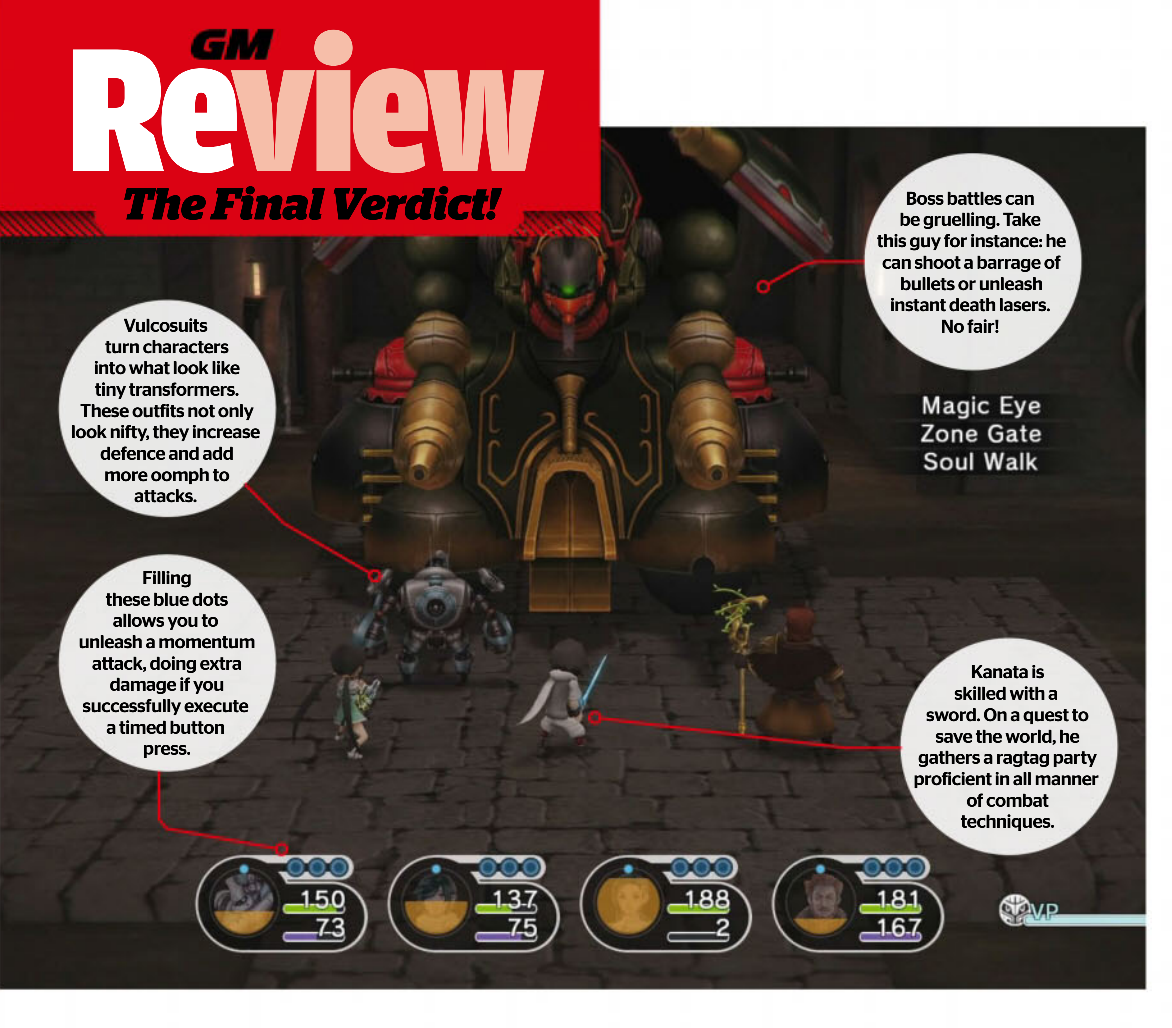
88%



Stunning and full of personality, this is a Dragon Ball game that has something for everyone.
Alan Wen

GM **Review**

The Final Verdict!



Format Switch, PS4 (reviewed), PC **Publisher** Square Enix **Developer** Tokyo RPG Factory **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

LOST SPHEAR

Finding fun and frustration in this old-school JRPG



e all lose things; from keys to controllers, objects are always going missing. The inhabitants of Lost Sphear's universe have more to fear than a few misplaced doodads, however. Their world suffers from a strange affliction whereby items, people, and even whole areas disappear, leaving only an eerie white mist in their wake. Protagonist Kanata and co are going to have to look a lot further than down the back of the sofa for this missing matter.

The phenomenon, rather uninspiringly referred to as 'lost', serves both the narrative and gameplay of this traditional Japanese role-playing adventure. Kanata has the ability to restore what's lost using the power of memories. While the story provides its fair share of mystery interspersed with elements of humour, it's by far the least interesting aspect of Lost Sphear. The dialogue sections are numerous and lengthy, unravelling a plot that fails to deliver on the intrigue and emotion its offbeat premise suggests.

Making memories

The lost aspect works much better when it comes to gameplay, expanding the game's mechanics in inventive ways. Areas are regularly blocked off, requiring specific memories to restore things like doors and bridges to move forward. Monsters hold these memories, and you usually need to clear whole areas to progress. Encounters with enemies use a Chrono Trigger-like real-time-meets-turn-based combat system. Selecting a command freezes the action and allows you to place your character anywhere on the battlefield, and you can potentially hit multiple targets, causing maximum carnage with some clever tactics, such as shooting a line of foes with Locke's snipe ability, or scorching a bunched group with Obaro's fire magic.

It's an incredibly enjoyable system that offers considerable depth when building your party's repertoire. Skills can be active abilities or passive perks such as extra damage or defence, effectively catering to all playstyles. While the regular battles seldom actually require the level of strategy the combat system affords – enemies are routinely bested with just one or two basic attacks – the difficulty is ramped up significantly for the boss encounters. Battles with the game's more menacing foes are frantic and often devastating, requiring a thoughtful approach, quick reactions, and a wealth of healing potions to emerge victorious. New elements are introduced regularly throughout the 20-odd hour campaign, including mechanised 'vulcosuits'. These allow for extra damage to attacks, but guzzle up non-regenerating vulcosuit points, meaning you'll have to be savvy when deciding when to break them out.

Lost Sphear offers an authentic old-school JRPG experience that takes aspects from classics such as Chrono Trigger and Final Fantasy and weaves them with a modern styling similar to the studio's previous title, I Am Setsuna. The simple yet dazzling aesthetic does wonders to engross you in the delightfully nostalgic adventure. While the narrative doesn't provide the kind of gripping plot present in the genre's greats, the superb battle system makes up for those shortcomings. ■

"BATTLES WITH THE GAME'S MORE MENACING FOES ARE FRANTIC AND OFTEN DEVASTATING"

What did Anne-Marie frequently lose during the game's challenging boss battles? Her temper.

GM LOVES...

- ✓ A charming tribute to the great JRPGs of yore.
- ✓ Combat has a lot of substance, making battles satisfying.

GM HATES...

- ✗ The narrative is bland and dialogue sections can drag.
- ✗ Dungeons are short; navigating them can be overly simplistic.

Better than...



World Of Final Fantasy
Despite its impressive fan service, this charming Final Fantasy title doesn't match Lost Sphear when it comes to enjoyable combat.

Worse than...



I Am Setsuna
Like Lost Sphear, I Am Setsuna recaptures the golden era of JRPGs, but with a superior story and setting it's our choice.

NEED TO KNOW



Lost Sphear is the second game by Tokyo RPG Factory. Captivated by JRPGs as kids, the team members have worked to preserve that distinctly old-style experience in both their projects.

GM JUDGEMENT



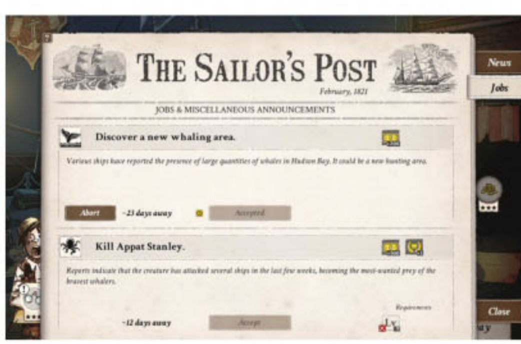


A meaty turn-based combat system means this should satisfy your hunger for traditional JRPGs.
Anne-Marie Coyle



Occasionally events occur that can lead to improvements in your crew – or the loss of a colleague if handled badly.





Format PC **Publisher** Fish Eagle **Developer** Picaresque Studio **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

NANTUCKET

Not exactly a whale of a time

Call us GamesMaster. Some weeks ago – never mind how long precisely – having little or no money in our purse, and nothing particular to interest us on shore, we thought we would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.

All this Moby Dick stuff is all very well, but this nautical strategy RPG is heading for shallower waters than Sunless Sea or Sid Meier's Pirates (flip back to p48 for happy memories of that classic!). Functioning as a sort of epilogue to a certain great work of American literature, Nantucket sees Ishmael, sole survivor of Ahab's fateful clash with the white whale, become a captain himself. His first ship's even called the Melville.

Whaling is still very much on Ishmael's mind. As a supporter of fine print journalism he turns to the local paper for jobs (find missing ships, deliver goods, kill big not-actually-fishy things), rummages in the tavern to find crew (all cabin boys at first, none of them called Roger), researches new tech at the dockyard, and purchases supplies at the store. There's easy prey off the coast of New England, and the Arctic waters to the north offer good hunting if you can find it. There's excellent money to be made from those barrels of blubber and whale meat if you can triumph in the dice-and-card-based combat.

Seas the day

The 'if you can find it' part is important. Your ship moves painfully slowly sometimes, and it's possible early on to become trapped in a totally no-win scenario, such as getting stuck in Honolulu without the means to leave. Whaling is all about the hunt, open waters with nowhere to hide and the need for full holds, bold crew, and a ship that can take a battering, but an early paucity of prey makes it difficult to get a flying start. Later there are more whales than you find on Plaid Cymru's membership list, including named beasts with bounties on their heads, and possibly one that's white.

Another frustration is the wall along the edge of the map – nothing exists west of Hawaii or east of Madagascar, so trips to the Pacific always mean crawling back around Tierra del Fuego – and the coast of South America is often home to pirates out to attack you.

PC games nowadays are pushing visual boundaries, but Nantucket takes things in a different direction. To call its looks simple would be an understatement; with its small amounts of animation on static screens it almost feels like an iPad game that got lost on its way to the App Store. They do, however, suit the subject matter, as do the paper navigation charts and the sea shanties sung by your crew.

Nantucket is a charming curio, and probably the kindest way to approach a game about whaling, but also a game in which you'll spend plenty of time watching a small ship navigate a large ocean. When one of the great beasts of the sea kills your crew easily it can feel frustrating, but sailing into harbour with a blood-drenched cargo to sell and a tale of victory against cetacean might to tell can be thrilling, no matter how abstract. It's not a game that's packed with excitement, but manages a quiet satisfaction nonetheless. ■

"THERE'S EXCELLENT MONEY TO BE MADE FROM THOSE BARRELS OF BLUBBER AND WHALE MEAT"

There once was a whaler from Nantucket... [Sorry, this was the only line of Ian's limerick clean enough to print – Ed]

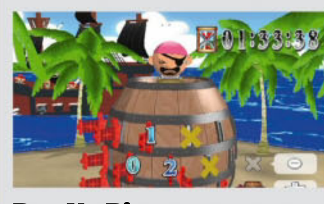
GM LOVES...

- It's such a novel (ho ho) idea that you can't help but be charmed.
- A dice roll going just the way you want feels magical.

GM HATES...

- It's too slight to capture your full attention for long.
- Getting trapped in a no-win situation is hugely frustrating.

Better than...



Pop Up Pirate
Purely random, with some terrifying eye-bulge animation, this WiiWare game might have some entertainment value if you're under five.

Worse than...



Sid Meier's Pirates!
It's hard to think of another game about whaling, but this lovely slice of Caribbean sailing-plus-plunder is certainly shipshape.

NEED TO KNOW



The devs' blog at www.picaresquestudio.com gives an insight into what it takes to make such a deceptively simple looking game, from pathfinding to programming the random events.

GM JUDGEMENT





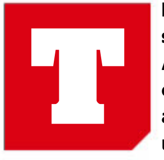
The perfect sort of game to play while doing something else – unless you're a whale, of course.
Ian Evenden

The best bits of humour are the fun environmental jokes in the background. Look out for them.

Format PC **Publisher** Team Junkfish **Developer** Team Junkfish **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

ATTACK OF THE EARTHLINGS

It's a bug's hunt



These halls are stalked by a beast. A terrifying creature of bottomless appetite and unrivalled cruelty. An animal which consumes without remorse, whose lust for violence is so deep that in the absence of opponents it will happily turn on its own kind. A truly evil monster spawned from the depths of Hell. The most dangerous animal of all… okay, you get the picture. It's homo sapiens. Thankfully we're giant, spiky, flesh-eating insects, so hopefully things will be pretty even. It also helps that these particular humans have no peripheral vision and keep conveniently standing around with their backs turned.

Team Junkfish's second-ever offering, Attack Of The Earthlings, is quite a departure from its first release, procedurally generated survival horror game Monstrum. If you've got a long memory, you might recall that we didn't think much of its first effort back in 2015, but does Attack Of The Earthlings fare better? Short answer: yes. Long answer… well, keep reading.

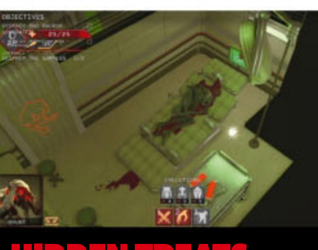
Attack Of The Earthlings is an XCOM-style turn-based strategy game with a comedic bent. You control the Swarmers, Xenomorph-like aliens, as they seeks to purge their planet of the men and women of Galactoil, a greedy, dysfunctional intergalactic mining company. Leading Galactoil is Mr Dickinham (hardy har), the obliviously arrogant CEO, and his personal assistant, toady opportunist Mr Pecker (hardy har). Backing them up is the muscle of the crew, chief of security Blitzit (hardy har?) and her personally trained security corps. The roughly six-hour story campaign follows the Swarmers as they murder and devour their way through the seven floors of the Galactoil mining station, from the dirty and unsafe engineering sections to the plush upper boardrooms.

> "MURDER AND DEVOUR YOUR WAY THROUGH THE SEVEN FLOORS OF THE GALACTOIL MINING STATION"

Swarm and cozy

As well as XCOM, Attack Of The Earthlings seems to take inspiration from real-time strategy stealth games such as Commandos, as the key to completing each level is staying out of sight and laying careful ambushes. Each level starts you off with only one unit, the Swarmer Matriarch. By killing and devouring enemies you can gather biomass and use it to spawn Swarmer Grunts, a cheap but weak unit. Devour more humans, and you can evolve your Grunts to one of three special units: the Goliath, a heavily armoured but conspicuous bruiser, the Disruptor, which has long-range attack capabilities, and the Stalker, a unit with armour piercing attacks who can sneak around in vents.

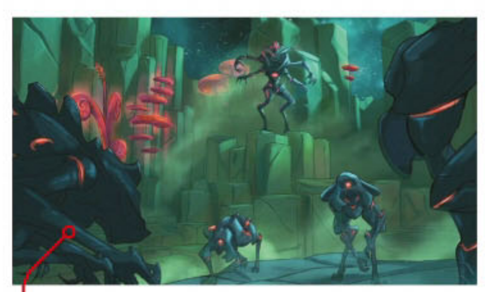
You can upgrade your special units between levels. Each type has a linear series of three upgrades that you can purchase with currency earned from beating levels. Each level boasts a variety of enemy units, most of which are specifically countered by one of your special units, so the trick is getting the



HIDDEN TREATS

Japes and jokes galore!

Those of us who love easter egg hunting certainly get our money's worth here. Combing the environments, we found references to Stranger Things, Alien, Predator, Red Dwarf, and Office Space, to name but a few. Thankfully these are confined to background easter eggs, and the dialogue avoids relying on references to get laughs. There's some funny original stuff going on in the background too – such as the motivational robot in engineering getting shoved into a compactor, or the pitiable weapons-disabled security turret that keeps getting emotionally scarred by all the blood and horror.



The Swarmers are suitably gross and nasty looking, perfect for eating pesky humans





Galactoil isn't known for its safe working conditions... and the giant, flesh-eating monsters don't help.

ADVENTURES WITH CARLOS

Just one mind-controlled drone's day at work

Life's hard when a horrific alien matriarch has put a parasite in your brain that forces you to obey her every whim... especially when you're slaving away for a giant corporation far, far from your home planet and to top it all off, it's your birthday!

One of the standout sequences in the game is the journey of Carlos, a hapless, dead-end human worker who your Swarmer Matriarch turns into a hapless, dead-end drone. (Remember, even though you can upgrade your units, stealth and strategy are key to winning the game.)

The level is designed to show you how you can use mind-controlled civilians as scouts, but it's also a great lesson in dark comedy. As the now monstrous, bug-eyed Carlos takes a journey through his work place, his once friends and colleagues don't really notice the difference. A new hair-cut perhaps? Anyway, it was Carlos' birthday the day that he got turned into a creeping abomination, so enjoy the cake with your friends, before you turn off the security system to allow your dark mother to enter and devour them with impunity and turn their genetic uniqueness into a chittering horde of alien soldiers. Except for Trevor the turret, of course. His defensive AI is turned off and as he's made of metal we can't eat him and make him into new Swarmers, so he just gets to watch the carnage and be emotionally scarred for the rest of his artificial life! What fun!

right aliens in the right places. The armoured, minigun-toting Enforcer can be taken down by the armour-piercing Stalker. The sword-swinging, explosive-rigged Banshees can be sniped by a Disruptor, and the meaty Elite Guards and Pathfinders can be smashed by the hard-hitting Goliaths. You can also co-ordinate your alien children to attack simultaneously, so your victim's pesky human friends can't trigger an alarm and spoil your plans.

When it works, this formula is good fun. It's satisfying to anticipate the enemy, line up a perfect ambush, and then devour their sorry carcasses. Unfortunately while the core mechanics are solid enough, the whole thing lacks depth, and because of this everything becomes quite repetitive after the first couple of levels. All three of the special alien units are introduced on the second level, so the mechanics don't evolve much over the course of the game. In addition, the mechanic of countering enemy units with your units is good on paper, but in practice it can be quite irritating – when you've already spent all of your Biomass on Goliaths to defeat the Elite Guards in the last area, it's uniquely frustrating to then be confronted with a group of Enforcers, who eat Goliaths for lunch. Lots of little things contribute to this irritation, such as how setting up an ambush with an Overwatch attack still triggers an enemy counterattack, so if your countering units are off somewhere else and you need to take down a threat quickly, you're just out of luck. Some of the later levels are hard to complete without reloading saves, as it's never clear what kind of threats you'll need to counter until you actually get to them.

The upgrade trees for the special units are a good idea, but could be implemented better. None of the three upgrades massively changes how the units function. Instead of the linear structure it would have been really nice to have seen some branching options which give different tactical options, or allow you to focus on the battle style you like best. Instead you'll just be clicking off the upgrades as you go for everyone except the Disruptor, which isn't really worth upgrading at all.

Everybody's dead, Dave

While the graphics won't exactly require a powerhouse of a PC, the visuals are pleasing. The character models are characterful and detailed, though the animations can be a tad clunky and out of sync with movement at times. There are some entertaining background jokes scattered around the environments, and it can be fun to scan a level looking for them. It's a real shame there aren't more cutscenes, as the couple you encounter in the first levels are well done and genuinely funny. The humour is a bit hit-and-miss, but it should get a few chuckles. The voice acting is uniformly great, particularly the work of comedy YouTuber ProZD (SungWon Cho). It's obviously heavily inspired by classic British comedies such as Red Dwarf, and it manages to capture that same atmosphere at times, but a few of the jokes go on too long and wear out their welcome.

Attack Of The Earthlings is fundamentally a good game, with some fun mechanics and enjoyable humour. It is clunky and limited, though, and probably isn't going to be on your replay pile any time soon. We also encountered a progression-breaking bug on the penultimate level, which hopefully by the time you read this will have been patched. If you can pick it up at a reasonable price, perhaps during a Steam sale, it's definitely worth a play. ■

Why do the aliens prefer to go to the Caribbean for their holidays? 'Swarmer.'

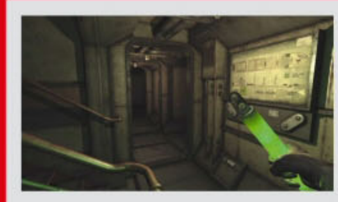
GM LOVES...

- Its strong sense of humour pays off more often than not.
- The strategy mechanics are good fun, if a little simple.

GM HATES...

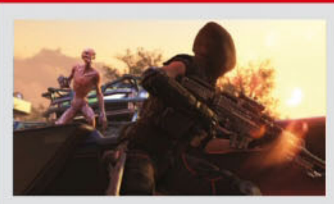
- It's quite clunky, and becomes repetitive and fiddly later on.
- Not all the humour lands, and some of the jokes go on too long.

Better than...



Monstrum
Attack Of The Earthlings is a marked improvement over Team Junkfish's spaceship-set last effort in pretty much every regard.

Worse than...



XCOM 2
It's maybe not a fair comparison, but when it comes to alien-filled turn-based strategy gaming, Firaxis just can't be beat.

NEED TO KNOW



YouTuber SungWon Cho doesn't just provide voices for this game. He can also be heard in cutesy platformer A Hat In Time and downright bizarre adventure game Paradigm.

GM JUDGEMENT

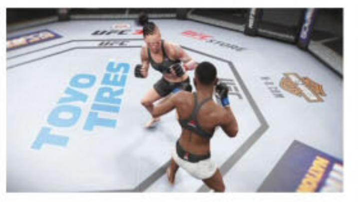
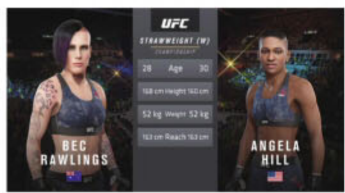
74%



A fun strategy experience, limited by some rough edges and far too much repetition.
Laurence Phillips

GM Review
The Final Verdict!


There's something absolutely delightful about creating the silliest avatar possible and using them to batter the ego-tastic Conor McGregor.


Format PS4 (reviewed), XO **Publisher** EA Sports **Developer** EA Canada **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

EA SPORTS UFC 3

Now UFC see me, now you don't



This sports fighting title made us feel how, we imagine, our grandmothers feel while watching violent videogames or Tarantino movies. This certainly is the Ultimate Fighting Championship, if by 'Ultimate' you mean 'Really Very Violent'. It's a credit to the quality of animation-work and grisly sound effects (and testament to our wussiness) that we never stopped wincing through every uppercut, hook, and roundhouse kick to the face. The bloodied faces are grim enough, but the crunching noise of someone dodging into a punch still haunts us.

Brutal it may be, but it's also an accomplished fighter. Bouts split into two broad types of action – the standing game of kicks and punches, and the grappling and submission elements, which are kind of like hugging, if the object of hugs were to maim the other person. As you might expect, the former is more satisfying. Chaining punches and kicks together while avoiding taking blows yourself is the main aim – holding your guard and taking potshots gets you nowhere. Without building momentum and landing sequential blows, a decent adversary will brush off your attacks. It's less about wearing down an opponent over time, and more about working towards delivering a crushing sequence of attacks. There's a careful rhythm required, as well as a need to keep your cool when things are going well, lest you descend into a mindless flurry of attacks that will leave you exposed. On the flip side, being on the receiving end of a masterfully timed combo requires deft dodging and blocking if you want to avoid falling flat to the arena floor.

On the ropes

Fights usually descend to the floor, either through knockdowns or grapples, but it's here where things become less thrilling, moving from action-packed brawler to a strange rock-paper-scissors and tug-of-war hybrid. Prompts appear on screen, relating to control-stick directions, as well as positions. It's an odd race to a dominant stance with the occasional opportunity to punch your adversary in the gut, like a real, classy sportsperson. Unlike the responsive jabs and hooks, inputs are a little too far abstracted from your on-screen counterpart, leaving you feeling more like a sadistic weirdo than a hardened brawler. Similarly, submissions come down to reaction times, watching bars increase and flicking the stick in the right direction faster than your opponent. It dilutes what should be the pinnacle of a fight into a mediocre minigame.

In some ways, it's appropriate that UFC 3 leaves you feeling occasionally remote from your fighter, because the area in which it excels is in capturing the spirit of watching the real-world sport. TV-style presentation and commentary create the illusion of a live event, and seeing a muscular approximation of yourself – made with the comprehensive in-game character creator – swagger into an arena is a giddy joy. An entertaining story mode, in which you aim to become the Greatest Of All Time through training, fights, and Twitter spats, is the beefiest of the modes, with a FIFA-like Ultimate Team and an assortment of other match types sealing the deal. This generous package doesn't quite do enough to redeem a game that's solid, but no knockout. ■

> "SUBMISSIONS ARE LIKE HUGGING, IF THE OBJECT OF HUGS WERE TO MAIM THE OTHER PERSON"

Which part of this UFC-themed joke is the funniest? The kick-line! Wait, no, that's not right…

GM LOVES...

- It's beautiful – if hyper-real bloody noses count as beautiful.
- Landing a sequence of blows on a tricky foe is so cathartic.

GM HATES...

- QTE-style submissions create a dull end to many fights.
- There're lots of modes, but most feel somewhat superfluous.

Better than...



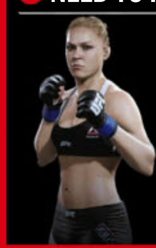
UFC 2
Tweaks to the formula have made the third instalment a definite improvement, even if it's still not mastered the floor-based elements.

Worse than...



Street Fighter V
A very different style of fighter, for sure, but SFV is more accomplished and nuanced in every way, except perhaps in the visual department.

NEED TO KNOW



There's a dizzying number of fighters (over 200) across a range of weight classes, from icons like Conor McGregor and Ronda Rousey (who, er, just signed with WWE), to less well known entrants.

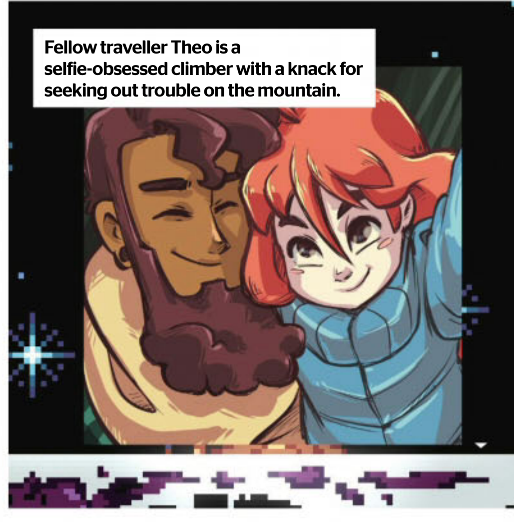
GM JUDGEMENT

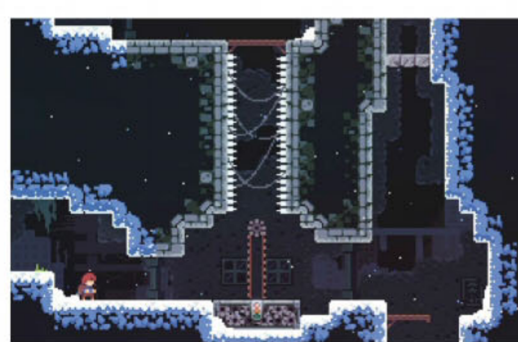


62%



Captures all the pomp and ceremony of a prize-fight, but leaves you a little distant from the action.
Alex Jones


Fellow traveller Theo is a selfie-obsessed climber with a knack for seeking out trouble on the mountain.



Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC (reviewed) **Publisher** Matt Makes Games Inc **Developer** Matt Makes Games Inc **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

CELESTE

The hills are alive with the sound of losing

British mountaineer George Mallory once commented he wanted to climb Mount Everest "because it's there". A similar motivation drives the plotline of this challenging 2D platformer from the creators of 2013 hit TowerFall, which is reminiscent of everything from Super Mario to Super Meat Boy.

Don't be fooled by its charming exterior – Celeste isn't for the faint of heart. Its gameplay is built around a simplistic yet super-responsive control scheme, forcing you to jump, dash, and climb around unforgiving obstacles with a high degree of precision. The game encourages you to take pride in your death count, which often enters the hundreds per level, easing the pain with lightning-quick respawns following each failed attempt.

Celeste features over 600 in-game screens, separated into seven main chapters with a generous selection of unlockable content. Altogether, around eight platforming hours make up an initial playthrough, the majority of which blends creative level design with enough rage-inducing elements to leave your controller in shards. Fortunately, even in its most frustrating moments Celeste's addictive nature and fair sense of challenge demands just one more go.

Each chapter also incorporates a set of unique gameplay abilities – blocks you have to dash through, say, or ones that allow you to jump higher. These levels aren't without their drawbacks, with occasional midsection lulls derailing the fun through repetition and irritating enemies. For the most part, though, Celeste is highly enjoyable, with a lengthy, feature-filled conclusion serving as the highlight of its strenuous climb.

Don't stop believin'

The underlying theme of the narrative is of self-discovery, with lead character Madeline coming face-to-face with her inner demons during her quest to conquer Celeste Mountain. It's explored through little more than dialogue boxes and Banjo Kazooie-like murmurs, with fairly hit-and-miss results. Fortunately, the story picks up towards the end of the campaign, bolstered by a noteworthy character-building segment.

The most memorable highs can be attributed in part to Celeste's enticing presentation. Made up of detailed backdrops and sprites, the visuals work in tandem with the superb soundtrack, synth tunes and soothing live piano conveying a unique feel. The character-focused artwork heightens the appeal, breathing additional life into a small cast of mountain dwellers.

This charming sense of style rarely wavers, and the game's appeal actually grows with repeated playthroughs, thanks to its focus on satisfying both speedrunners and completionists – a host of collectibles, secrets, and time-related tools enhances replayability. There's even an Assist mode for the less experienced gamer, offering a tempting array of cheats to help you force your way to the finish line.

Assist mode largely counteracts what Celeste sets out to achieve, though, and if you're hoping to soak up every drop of the experience, you'll need a competitive edge, quick reflexes, and unwavering patience. If you have those things, you'll find this an addictive, brilliantly-crafted slice of platforming bliss. ■

"YOU'RE FORCED TO JUMP, DASH, AND CLIMB AROUND UNFORGIVING OBSTACLES WITH PRECISION"

Why couldn't the mountain climber stop laughing? They thought their jokes were too hill-arious.

GM LOVES...

- Inventive levels complement a set of highly fluid controls.
- It's packed with gorgeous pixel art and atmospheric audio.

GM HATES...

- The story struggles to capitalise on its emotional aspirations.
- It briefly loses steam around the midway point.

Better than...



Kero Blaster
Celeste is partly influenced by 2014 run-and-gun platformer Kero Blaster, and offers a meatier, more visually accessible campaign.

Worse than...



Super Mario Maker
We're hopeful Celeste will eventually benefit from level designer tools, as perfected in the utterly brilliant Super Mario Maker.

NEED TO KNOW



Celeste began life as Celeste Classic – a game created in four days for the PICO-8 fantasy console. Released for free in 2015, it spawned a passionate community of speedrunners.

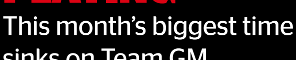
GM JUDGEMENT





An expertly designed, tough-as-nails platformer that rarely stumbles on its march to the summit.
Fraser Gilbert

GM Review
The Final Verdict!

NOW PLAYING


This month's biggest time sinks on Team GM



1 MONSTER HUNTER: WORLD
PS4

Battling a dinosaur with three mates, wielding a bow larger than my body, and wearing an outfit made of monster bones... this is pure videogame magic.

Robin Valentine, Editor



2 ASSASSIN'S CREED ORIGINS
PS4

Protagonist Bayek is such a charmer he's seduced my other half through the screen. I'm not even jealous – who could stay mad at that smile?

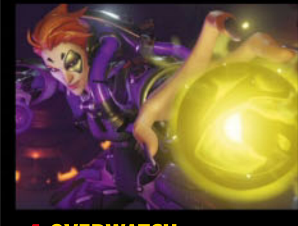
Robin Valentine, Editor



3 SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS
PS4

The remake is gorgeous. I first played it over a decade ago but it I still want to lose myself in it every time. I might not come back this time.

Sam Greer, Staff Writer



4 OVERWATCH
PC

I've finally caved to peer pressure. I don't love it but there's definitely fun to be had with the daft characters, especially with friends.

Sam Greer, Staff Writer



OFFICE LUNCHTIME GAME OF THE MONTH: TOWERFALL ASCENSION
PS4

Sam once more took the office to task, winning an impromptu tournament. Still the best local multiplayer around.



That first moment when you emerge from the escape pod is brilliantly overwhelming.

Format PS4, XO, PC (reviewed) **Pub** Unknown Worlds Entertainment **Dev** Unknown Worlds Entertainment **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

SUBNAUTICA

Everything's better, down where it's wetter



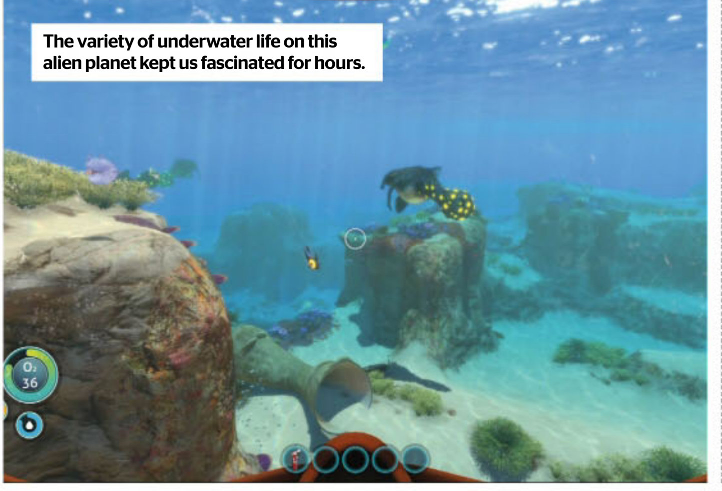
You know, the sea can be pretty but it can also be pretty damn terrifying. It's a dark, seemingly endless space where we can't breathe, full of far too many things that can kill us. Yet there is life down there unlike anything else on Earth, beautiful in unlikely ways. It's this powerful juxtaposition that Subnautica manages to capture just brilliantly.

You are cast as potentially the lone survivor of a spaceship crash, stranded on an alien world that is entirely covered in water. All you have is an escape pod with a fabricator, a device which can turn resources into tools and equipment. If you want to survive long enough to reach rescue, you're going to need to leave the comfort of your escape pod and venture into the water to find resources to use it on.

Seaing is believing

That first moment when you stand atop the escape pod, nothing but endless, unpopulated ocean visible in every direction, bracing yourself to dive in, is enough to paralyse you. You've no idea what waits below the surface of the sea, you've no idea how dangerous it is, and you've no tools yet to really help you. How easily Subnautica fires up the imagination, making you wonder what lies in the depths.

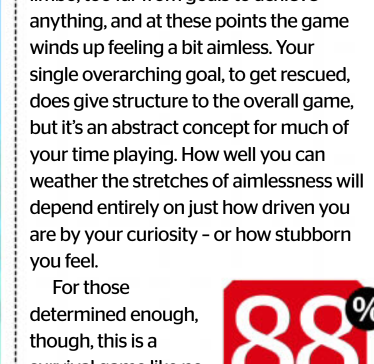
You'll soon begin to discover what's really there as you swim about among the reefs and caves. It's an intoxicating world, alien and strange but brimming with life. There's a constant trickle of colourful new fish and creatures to discover and the more explore, and the more resources and blueprints you have, the more tools you can build. Subnautica is a game that rewards curiosity even if the world it presents you with is filled with danger.



The variety of underwater life on this alien planet kept us fascinated for hours.

There are times where you hang in limbo, too far from goals to achieve anything, and at these points the game winds up feeling a bit aimless. Your single overarching goal, to get rescued, does give structure to the overall game, but it's an abstract concept for much of your time playing. How well you can weather the stretches of aimlessness will depend entirely on just how driven you are by your curiosity – or how stubborn you feel.

For those determined enough, though, this is a survival game like no other. ■ *Sam Greer*





Despite its problems, the visuals are arresting – if a bit confusing.

Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC (reviewed) **Publisher** Aspyr **Developer** PolyKnight Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

INNERSPACE

Will not bring you inner peace

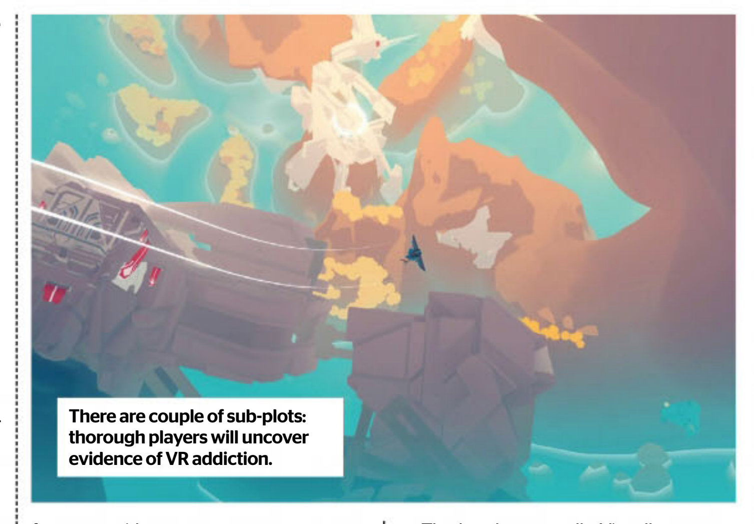


Some games capture the imagination. With fantastic visuals, unique gameplay, and a compelling story they completely engross you. Unfortunately, InnerSpace is not one of those games.

Well, that's not entirely true. The visuals are a delight. Set in an inverted world, InnerSpace places you inside a sphere of water with landmasses dotting the inner surface. You play as the Cartographer, a flying drone that can soar through the air and dive underwater. You're given the task of scouring the world for relics belonging to a lost ancient civilisation. The world is utterly strange, but thanks to the soft blues and reds of the water and land, it has a very pleasing look that in theory should make for a soothing world to be in. Sadly, it fails to deliver on the strength of the visuals.

Soar point

The flying, the game's core component, works well enough, but there's certainly none of the momentum or satisfaction that something like Abzû manages to deliver in its underwater diving. Yet the problem isn't simply that the flying fails to be compelling in its own right, it's that the game constantly wrenches control away



There are couple of sub-plots: thorough players will uncover evidence of VR addiction.

from you with unnecessary cutscenes. Worse, you're often either being shown something you already understand, or something that makes no sense. Either way, it's not a welcome distraction.

That confusion extends to the game as a whole So much of our time in the game is spent being lost or feeling disorientated. The downside to a full 360 degrees of movement is it's difficult to orientate yourself when there's no sky, no direction you can regard as 'up' or 'down'. Perhaps that's the point of the spherical setting, but the frustration it ends up creating feels at odds with the chilled out presentation.

That's a shame, really. Visually InnerSpace easily makes us think of games like Journey or Abzû, and you could well start playing expecting a similar dreamlike experience, but in execution it is far away from their intuitive design. InnerSpace is a confused and frustrating experience that seems afraid of letting you be free. If there was less handholding or perhaps a clearer set of objectives the game could make for some light fun but as it stands, it's a beautiful but wasted opportunity.

■ *Sam Greer*

49%



HOT DOWNLOADS

The latest DLC and expansions explored



We'll have the perfect excuse this month to return to one of our favourite games of 2017, as **Super Mario Odyssey** is expanding with upcoming DLC **Luigi's Balloon Hunt**. This free update introduces a whole new game mode, in which you must hide a balloon somewhere in a level, and then race to find as many balloons placed by other players as you can within a strict time limit. Getting us to make content for each other? Cunning, Nintendo.

With less hide and seek, more punch and kick, **Street Fighter V** has been reborn with **Arcade Edition**, a free update for existing owners or a discounted bundle for new players, which features a host of quality-of-life improvements including balancing, a new UI, and adjustments to modes. The underlying game is the same but this should be the definitive version – for now at least. Following shortly is the start of season 3, with six new characters available piecemeal or via the season pass.

Prefer all-out war to one-on-one battle? We've got something for you. Dice has brought out a new expansion for **Battlefield 1**, titled **Apocalypse**. There's a bunch of new maps (Passchendaele, Caporetto, River Somme, Razor's Edge, and London Calling) plus an all-new Air Assault mode for fans of dogfights. Expect an arsenal of new weapons as well to complement the new areas.

If you're tired of the First World War, you can dive into the sequel with **Call Of Duty: WWII**'s new DLC. The **Resistance** pack has three new maps for multiplayer, a new mode called Operation, and – perhaps most enticing of all – a new level for Zombies called 'The Darkest Shore'. It's out now, alongside a community event offering new weapons and accessories.

It's not just Call Of Duty that's putting the undead into the mix – **The Elder Scrolls Online's Dragon Bones** DLC, adds skeletal dragons to the MMO. This comes in the form of two new dungeons, one the burial site of a dragon priest and the other home to a wizard trying to resurrect an ancient dragon. Classic wizard behaviour.



THIS MONTH IN... FETCHING FOXES

Out now, Fe is a brilliantly stylised title from Zoink! Studios, released as part of EA Originals, the publisher's programme for indie titles. In it you control a fox-like creature called Fe and have to defend the forest from menacing nasties known as 'The Silent Ones'. Fe has to sing to the forest's other creatures to unlock new areas and abilities. Expect a full review next issue.





At full speed, this remains one of the most intense-ever assaults on your eyeballs.

With your Retro Master BEN TYRER

BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN

A peerless racer with an appetite for destruction

As series go, few were as rabidly focused on the thrill of speed as Criterion's Burnout titles. Within two games, it established a retina-troubling love of fast cars designed to respond to the lightest of thumb twitches. As good as they were, the third entry ramped everything up to become an EA-published mega-hit that provided the best arcade racing experience of the PS2 and Xbox era.

The origins

Not that Criterion's relationship with EA had the best of starts. Speaking to our sister magazine Games™ back in 2010, Burnout 3 director Alex Ward revealed that the first game Criterion worked on for the behemoth publisher was a reboot of Skate Or Die. After initial discussions in 2002, work began on the skating game, but publisher interference caused the developer to walk away from the project. According to Ward, it was at E3 2003 that EA's Bruce McMillan asked the Guildford-based developer to work with EA again. Despite some initial resistance on Criterion's part, the dev was promised it would get more control over what it made, and Burnout 3 was the result.

If its predecessors were fast, the third entry brought the fury in the form of Takedowns. While racing to the finish line would still be the goal, an early design document on Criterion's website shows how the idea of ultra-aggressive driving was in from the start. The document mentions earning boost from driving dangerously and bashing into cars, and introducing 'Knockouts' (cough, Takedowns) where you could earn a full boost bar by forcing opponents to crash.

Legend of Gaming #63

It would be a change that would define the series.

Getting them right, though, would be key, and the idea of the Takedown camera, where the car you just wrecked is shown tumbling through the air in slo-mo, came about. Lead programmer Alex Fry explained to Games™ that the frame rate would drop to 30fps just for the crash cam, so more detail could be shown. The experience of ramming a car and then getting to revel in the destruction you've just caused is the key to Burnout 3's instant gratification.

Developer Criterion
Publisher EA
Released 2004
Format GameCube, Xbox, PS2
Get it Shunting rivals aside on eBay.

The legend

Burnout 3 is a genuine classic of the racing genre. Building on the series' strong foundations, the introduction of Takedowns proved to be a masterstroke. Races were violent, reflex testing blurs of joy. Shunting, smashing, T-boning, and grinding on rivals made each lap a joyful frenzy, while satisfyingly responsive handling meant drifting at the perfect angle was just as much fun as when you duelled with the AI.

The action on the road had never been better – and everything around it had expanded in scope too. World Tour mode was a beefy single-player suite of races and tracks, which added plenty of depth to the vehicular carnage. For instance, Road Rage events did away with the concept of a finishing line and set you a target of Takedowns to achieve, only stopping when the time ran out or, more likely, when your car had become too damaged to continue.

We should also take a moment to remember the purity of Crash mode. Half destruction simulator, half intricate puzzle to be solved, this might have been a returning mode from Burnout 2 but the idea of chucking your car at a junction and trying to cause as much damage as possible was still intensely addictive, made even sweeter by the increased spectacle. Simply put, it was a complete package of rewarding racing and

"SHUNTING, SMASHING, T-BONING, AND GRINDING ON RIVALS MADE EACH LAP A JOYFUL FRENZY"



Every car you hit explodes like it's packed with TNT.







The soundtrack featured a fantastic selection of licensed songs.

astonishing carnage that felt brilliant to try to wrestle control of.

The legacy

Burnout swerved into the mainstream, skidding across a wave of critical adulation (it currently boasts a 94 on Metacritic) and shifting just under four million copies across PS2 and Xbox according to VGchartz.com.

EA loved it as much as everyone else, and ended up buying the developer outright. It was (and is) a successful acquisition, with Criterion going on to produce cult favourite FPS Black, open-world wonder Burnout Paradise, and two great Need For Speed games.

Over time, Burnout's influence on arcade racers has become clear. MotorStorm, Split/Second, and Blur all owe a little to the brash trail it blazed. If its influence has waned over the past few years, that's only because there are fewer noteworthy arcade racers, give or take the Forza Horizon series. However, with rumours of Burnout Paradise being remastered, it's hard not to hope Burnout 3 will get a chance to cause havoc again. Few experiences dance on the edge of chaos as well as it does. ■

Series Spotlight

A frantic drive down memory lane

1 Burnout

(PS2 - 2001)

The original might not have had Takedowns and Franz Ferdinand on the soundtrack, but it established Criterion's chops at making you feel the ludicrous speed of your car. Weaving through traffic and gunning around tracks felt dangerous and, therefore, exhilarating, although it's not aged quite as well as its descendants. Xbox and GameCube versions dropped a year later, proof that everyone liked racing recklessly.

2 Burnout 2: Point Of Impact

(PS2 - 2002)

A huge refinement over its predecessor, Burnout 2 was slicker and bigger in every way. While the graphical upgrade was most noticeable, there was also the inclusion of Pursuit mode. Here you needed to chase down a car and wreck it before it got away, making this entry a cult favourite with some fans. Again, Xbox and GameCube versions followed in 2003.









3 Burnout Legends

(PSP, DS - 2005)

The jump to portable devices was a mixed bag for the series. The core idea is that it remixes tracks and modes from the first three games with the core mechanics of Burnout 3. The PSP version felt like wizardry, squeezing itself onto the smaller screen without too many sacrifices. The DS version, to put it mildly, did not.

4 Burnout Revenge

(Xbox, PS2 - 2005)

The follow-up to Takedown went bigger by allowing you to shunt smaller pedestrian cars out of the way. The result was a cacophony of crumpled metal, mid '00s rock music, and swears when you failed to spot the barrier you slammed into. While it's not quite as fondly remembered as others in the series, it's still ridiculously fun.

5 Burnout Paradise

(PS3, 360 - 2008)

The final main entry in the series (for now?) reinvented the wheel by moving the action to the open-world Paradise City. Racing remained just as addictive, but the freedom to crave your own track from point to point meant you quickly built a relationship with this fictional metropolis and never wanted to leave. The Guns & Roses intro was the right side of corny.



SIX OF THE BEST...

GAME OVER SCREENS

When failure is its own reward

Death in gaming is a lot more pleasant than it is in real life. For one, you get back to come back from it, something that doesn't (the theory of reincarnation not withstanding) happen in our analogue lives. Plus, there's usually some form of encouragement to return to your adventure. Whether it's a detestable villain taunting you or a friendly message to persevere, the digital afterlife is usually the perfect salve to the frustration of getting there in the first place. Naturally, some are better than others, hence this feature's continued existence. As your guinea pigs in all things deceased, we've repeatedly sacrificed ourselves on the altar of gaming to discover which pixel heavens are worth taking a trip to. ■

UFO: ENEMY UNKNOWN
(PC - 1994)

Not only did you fail to repel the alien invasion of Earth, but you ballsed it up so badly that you got a short story about how humanity mutated into lumpy monsters as they tried to escape your boo-boo.

METAL GEAR SOLID
(PS1 - 1999)

The iconic yell of Snake's name from an off-screen handler, the violent synth strings that are as instantly recognisable as any other composition in gaming, and the simple message of 'Game Over' all let you know you done goofed.

FINAL FIGHT
(Arcade - 1989)

The continue screen for Final Fight was achingly '80s. If you played as Mike Haggar, you got the former wrestler-turned-politician tied up in chains, desperately trying to blow out a stick of dynamite in front of him. Exquisite.

BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
(PS3, Xbox, PC - 2009)

Bruce Wayne's rogues gallery is as deep as it is impressive. Rocksteady made the most out of a disturbing cast by getting them to taunt you whenever you croaked. Hamill's Joker was a delight.

STREET FIGHTER II

(SNES, Arcade - 1992)

So you've been battered. There's no escaping the fact, just look at your character's busted chops. At least you've got ten seconds to fish out another 50p coin and save Ryu the indignity of making the worst howl in history.

RESIDENT EVIL II

(PS1 - 1998)

People associate the phrase "You Died" with Dark Souls, but Mikami's baby was rubbing mortality in your face *a decade* earlier. Its blunt approach and squelchy sounds made this an unforgettable breather between zomb fights.

Grab Bag

Retro gems from every era

Awesome Boss!



Resident Evil 3

Format PC, Dreamcast, PS1 **Developer** Capcom **Released** 2000

Can you think of anyone more foreboding in the Resi series? Nemesis was a bio-organic weapon designed *purely* to destroy you, and he spent the entire game turning up at the most inopportune moments to terrorise you. Some of us still see his horrible, teethy gurn in our nightmares. Which is what you want from a horror game boss, really.

Classic Moment!



Stranglehold

Format PC, PS3, 360 **Developer** Midway Chicago **Released** 2007

The Casino level in John Woo's painfully under-appreciated Max Payne rip-off (sorry, homage) was a fantastic melting pot of what made this so much fun to play. The location was ludicrously glitzy, with so much of the environment to slide, swing, and gambol across. Plus the never-ending stream of bad guys to pump full of justice forced you to get creative.

Remake Request!



Sid Meier's SimGolf

Format PC **Developer** Firaxis Games **Released** 2002

Yes, Big Sid once made a golfing game. It wasn't just any old golfing game either, it was one where you designed your own course and could play through it as well using a simple point-and-click system. We're not ones to tell the guy who created Civ how to improve games, but returning to this and expanding on the golfing side *would* be very nice.

Trixel Creative is made up of Powerspell3, Renefoetsie, Rikorudaniel, Erysiol, Hallm3, Lego1109, HalfUp, LittleBigPlaye, Breezy-The-Pro, and finally, MastaBlastya.

SACK TO THE FUTURE

With your Culture Master LOUISE BLAIN

We meet **Trixel Creative's Halston Stephenson** and peer behind the scenes of the most official-looking LittleBigPlanet community level pack yet

While the team calls LBP home, it works on community creations for games including The Sims 4.



Let's face it. You miss Sackboy, don't you? You miss his shiny little eyes, that giant zip, that infectious smile. Bring his pals from LittleBigPlanet 3 into the mix and suddenly you realise you've been pining for a lot of oh-so-squishable platforming characters for a long time. Thankfully, lots of people have been hard at work creating even more content for Sackboy, Oddsock, Swoop, and Toggle to hurtle through.

The LBP3 building community is still going strong. Case in point, while level pack Return To Carnivalia might look like it's covered in Sony-approved fingerprints, Trixel Creative is completely independent. "It's always so nice to hear people say that our project looks official," enthuses art designer Halston Stephenson from the global team of connected creators. "Return To Carnivalia came about after playing and reminiscing on the 2012 LittleBigPlanet PS Vita game by Tarsier Studios. We thought 'Why not bring the story of LBP Vita to LBP3?'"

"Eventually the ideas turned into a reality as we started making conceptual levels, storyboards, and brainstorming ideas. More and more people joined in the project, including community music creators, sticker artists, level designers, a video editor, and more. Our main goal was always to collaborate and make something for the community. It's nice to have official level packs, but it's even more rewarding to show what LittleBigPlanet 3 is capable of in the players' hands."

And it turns out that players' hands are the safest to be in. Trixel Creative even managed to come up with an innovative solution to recreate the unique Vita control set-up. No touchscreen? No problem. "The third game, as you may know, has 16 layers as opposed to the previously standard three," explains Stephenson. "This, along with the new tools and three games worth of content, proved to be both challenging and rewarding for the creators. We wanted to keep the unique gameplay that LBP Vita had to offer, however the PS4 obviously doesn't have touchscreen or rear-touch capabilities, so we came up with the idea to transfer the rear-touch gameplay into the controller's SixAxis tilt mechanic. We also changed the touchscreen gameplay into using the otherwise-unused right stick. This allows us to be more creative in level design and gameplay, as well as keeping the nostalgic feel of LBP Vita. Adding in these new gameplay features was something that we hadn't really seen before in community levels, and that's a big part of what makes Return To Carnivalia stand out."

Fry up

If you've ever asked 'How long did this take?' as you marvelled at a LBP community level, the answer here is *years*. Among the team's other projects, Return To Carnivalia has taken more than two years of hard work. Oh, and it's Trixel Creative's first community pack. Why start small, eh? "It's a homage to the amazing work on LBP Vita," confirms Stephenson. "As such, we want to make it the best it can be for the community. We have

> "OUR MAIN GOAL WAS TO COLLABORATE AND MAKE SOMETHING FOR THE COMMUNITY"



Return To Carnivalia includes new stickers and costumes for your characters.



The team has even created music for the build that you can collect as you progress. Note bad.



If you played LittleBigPlanet on PS Vita, you will know what's going on but there are all kinds of new side-levels and minigames to keep you on your sack toes.



been through several iterations of each level in the pack and have scrapped and replaced quite a lot of content just to make sure things feel right. There is certainly a good bit of gameplay. We are still seeing it come together ourselves, so we are just as excited as everyone else!"

Oddsock, Toggle, and Swoop were only introduced for the third game and Stephenson is quick to address the fact that the original campaign was limited in terms of getting your teeth into the three. "The LBP3 story mode had just a handful of levels for players to use the new characters in, so it should be interesting for the community to see how our creators have made use of them here," he says.

Getting creative with LBP has never been easier. Sackboy's box of tricks is already on your PS4 and ready to go. You just need to bring your brain. "We were all drawn to LittleBigPlanet because it's allowed us to easily bring to life ideas and concepts in our heads that we otherwise would keep to ourselves," says Stephenson. "I have a love of the franchise because it's fun. It can be stupidly silly, or it can be terrifying or staggeringly beautiful depending on who is creating behind the controller. It's a game that is what you make it and it's inspiring to see what people have done with it... Everyone has a creative spark somewhere inside them, and with LittleBigPlanet you get the resources and user-friendly design that helps to bring it out."

Trixel Creative is putting the final touches on the pack. Does Stephenson have any advice for budding LittleBigPlaneteers? "It's important to not get too attached to what you create. Iteration is a vital part of development and you shouldn't be scared to change your hard work for the better. You might lose a section you worked hard on but the thing in its place is now twice as fun." Wise words indeed. Time to dust off LBP3. ■ ***Louise Blain***

SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS!

Play this!

Return To Carnivalia will be available later this year on your PS4. All you'll need is a copy of LittleBigPlanet 3, head to the community moons, and you'll be good to go!

GM GLOBAL MASTER

The best gaming gadgets from CES 2018



REAL PRO

Making the current Vive VR headset look like it was made in the stone age, HTC has unveiled a new model of the head-worn display. Not only is there an option to make it wireless and two front-facing cameras but it has a 78% resolution improvement. Get saving.

LAGGING AREA

If you're the kind of person who'll buy anything with tech called the 'Killer Prioritisation Engine' inside, then the new Linksys router for Xbox One gaming is for you. Sure, the WRT32XB will protect you from lag spikes mid-PUBG match but it costs $300. For that we'd expect it to get our chicken dinner for us.

BEZEL OF A TIME

So you've got the perfect three-screen setup for your PC but can't cope with those lines between the screens. The Bezel Free Kit from Asus solves all of that with a complex setup of mirrors and light refraction. We're not sure of the science but it looks pretty incredible.





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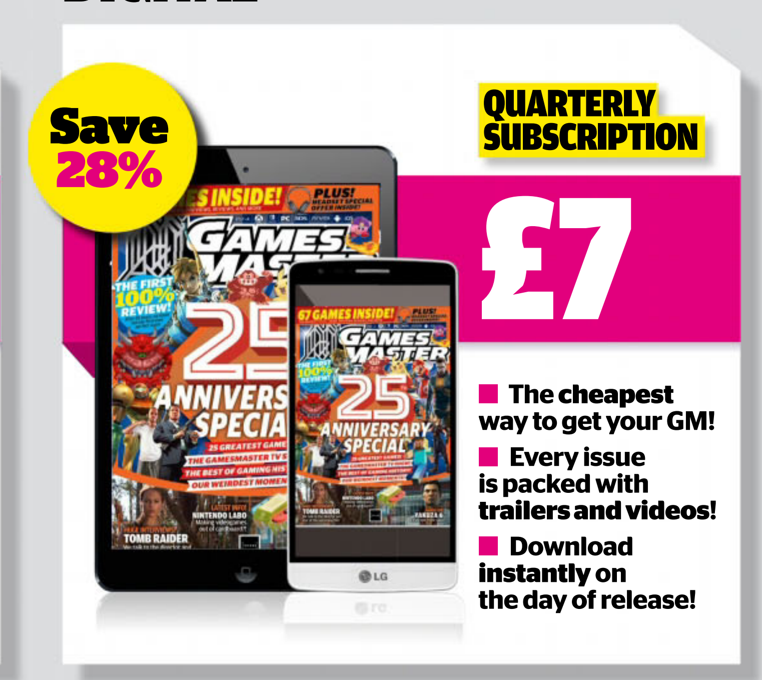
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INSIDE NEXT ISSUE...



VAMPYR



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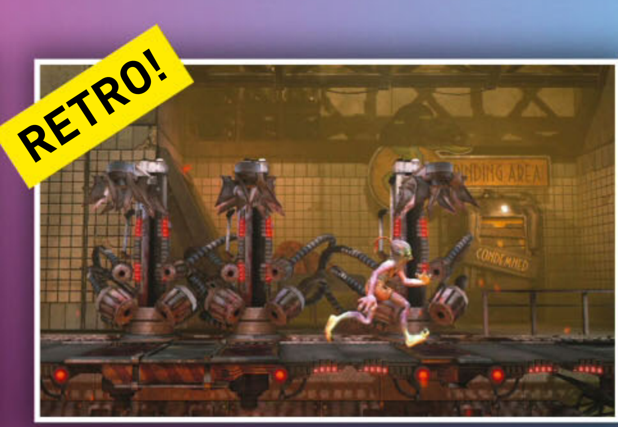
METAL GEAR SURVIVE



SECRET OF MANA



SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS



ABE'S ODDYSEE

PLUS LOADS MORE!

Due to the unpredictable nature of the gaming world, all contents are subject to change.

GAMES MASTER GAME GUIDE

Our definitive list of the best games to play right now

Not sure which games to grab? Trust the experts (that's us) to shine a light of clarity through your fog of confusion. Over this spread you'll find GamesMaster's 100 per cent scientifically accurate and indisputable list of the greatest games on modern machines – updated monthly – as well as the top five most vital exclusives on each of the major platforms. Pick one of these up and, buddy, you're going to have yourself a good time.

1



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD
Switch / Wii U
Nintendo casually revolutionises the open-world genre with perhaps the best launch title ever. Explore, fight, and cook your way across Hyrule.

2



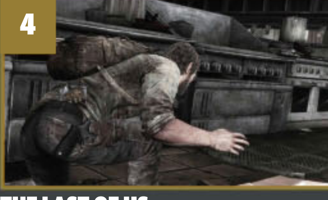
GRAND THEFT AUTO V
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360
Rockstar's most detailed, immersive cityscape yet serves as the backdrop for a brilliantly explosive, multi-layered crime saga.

3



THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT
PS4 / XO / PC
An unbelievably vast fantasy world, where grim adventure – and brilliantly mature, engaging storytelling – lurks around every corner.

4



THE LAST OF US
PS4 / PS3
Naughty Dog's greatest triumph yet: the dark and truly cinematic tale of Joel and Ellie, two survivors in a dying world.

5



DARK SOULS III
PS4 / XO / PC
Take on some of gaming's most unforgiving enemies in weighty, impactful battles. There are few games more satisfying to beat.

6



PERSONA 5
PS4 / PS3
The greatest JRPG on current-gen – a stylish, rebellious story of teenage fury and surreal journeys into your enemies' minds.

7

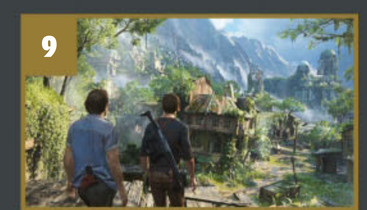


HORIZON: ZERO DAWN
PS4
A truly unique vision from the creators of Killzone. Primitive humans hunt robotic beasts across a beautiful wilderness.



SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
Switch / Wii U

Switch's first Mario game is also one of the best ever, taking you on an unashamedly joyous globe-trotting adventure.



UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
PS4

An incredible end to one of the most spectacular series around, seeing Nathan Drake off in style. One of the best-looking games ever made.



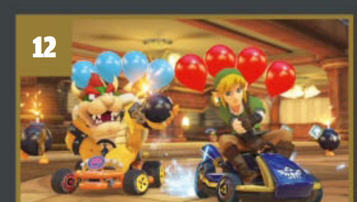
FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
XO / PC

The best entry in the series yet, and one of the greatest racing games ever made. It's absolutely gorgeous to boot.



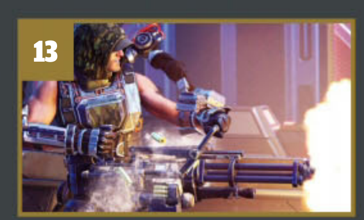
OVERWATCH
PS4 / XO / PC

Colourful characters and slick shooting make this multiplayer FPS from the makers of World Of Warcraft utterly irresistible.



MARIO KART 8
Switch / Wii U

The definitive kart racer, now portable and packed with new features on Switch. Own a Nintendo console? This is a must-have.



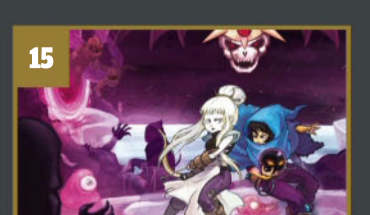
XCOM 2
PS4 / XO / PC

A turn-based strategy masterpiece that doesn't pull its punches. Try not to get too attached to your soldiers, eh?



MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF WAR
PS4 / XO / PC

Solid third-person action elevated by its incredible system of procedurally-generated orcs, each with their own personality.



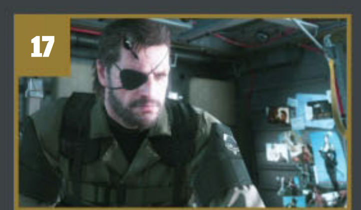
TOWERFALL ASCENSION
Switch / PS4 / XO / PC / PS Vita

A true legend of local multiplayer action that still eats up our office lunchtimes to this day. The very definition of easy to learn, hard to master.



HELLBLADE: SENUA'S SACRIFICE
PS4 / PC

A harrowing journey into a mythological underworld serves as the perfect backdrop to an exploration of real-world mental illness.



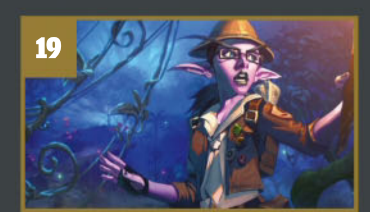
METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360

Hideo Kojima's last hurrah brings open-world action to the revered series.



DOTA 2
PC

A strange and intimidating beast – but take the time to learn its secrets and you'll find a game of incredible tactical depth and variety.



HEARTHSTONE
PC / Mobile

Blizzard achieves the once-impossible – making deck-building CCGs accessible to all. Prepare to lose all your free time in 15-minute chunks.



MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOMS BATTLE
Switch

Don't let its cute looks fool you – this is a tight and devilishly difficult turn-based strategy game.



BLOODBORNE
PS4

Dark Souls' more agile cousin, tighter and faster but no less punishing, in a world of gothic horror and Lovecraftian nightmares.



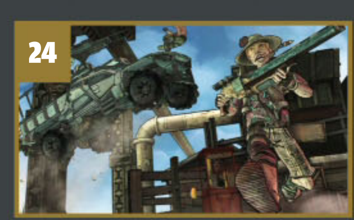
RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD
PS4 / XO / PC

First-person horror action that both pays fitting tribute to the series' past, and tries something totally different. Even more terrifying in VR.



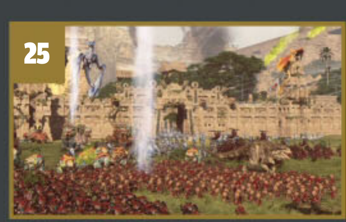
PYRE
PS4 / PC

This spellbinding follow-up to Bastion seamlessly blends intricate storytelling with… well, magical basketball, basically. Trust us, it works.



TALES FROM THE BORDERLANDS
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360 / Mobile

Telltale's formula at its very best – witty, exciting, and packed with unforgettable characters. Don't be put off by the setting.



TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER II
PC

Strategy gaming on an incredible scale, in a gloriously over-the-top fantasy world. Get the first one too and you can combine them!

THE TOP EXCLUSIVES
The five best for each console



1. FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
2. HALO 5: GUARDIANS
3. KALIMBA
4. QUANTUM BREAK
5. GEARS OF WAR 4



1. THE LAST OF US REMASTERED
2. HORIZON: ZERO DAWN
3. UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
4. HELLBLADE
5. BLOODBORNE



1. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD
2. SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
3. MARIO KART 8 DELUXE
4. MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOM BATTLE
5. ARMS



1. DOTA 2
2. TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER II
3. GUILD WARS 2
4. THE SIMS 4
5. CRUSADER KINGS 2



1. POKÉMON SUN AND MOON
2. FIRE EMBLEM FATES
3. ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF
4. MONSTER HUNTER GENERATIONS
5. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS



1. HEARTHSTONE
2. DEVICE 6
3. 80 DAYS
4. SORCERY 4
5. MONUMENT VALLEY



GAMESMASTER 25TH ANNIVERSARY QUIZ!

Put your knowledge to the test with these fiendish questions

QUESTION 1

What score did we give Sonic The Hedgehog 2 in our very first issue?

QUESTION 2

If you entered our competition included in issue nine, which film could you have potentially been an extra in?

QUESTION 3

Which of these three celebrities *did not* appear on the GamesMaster TV show: Stewart Lee, Randy Savage, or Eddie Izzard?

QUESTION 4

Which of these boy bands *did* make an appearance on the GamesMaster TV show: Westlife, Take That, or Nsync?

QUESTION 5

How many editors has GamesMaster had over the years?

QUESTION 6

True or false: Homer Simpson has been a GamesMaster cover star.

Answers: 1. 65% 2. D2: The Mighty Ducks 3. Eddie Izzard 4. Take That 5. Seven 6. True – we've actually done multiple Homer Simpson covers


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